

No 137.

**FAME**

5 Cents.

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# FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

## DICK HADLEY'S MINE; OR, THE BOY GOLD DIGGERS OF MEXICO.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Pepita stamped her foot angrily and uttered a shrill cry. Immediately Pedro Pacheco, gun in hand, followed by two other Mexicans, appeared over the brow of the eminence.

"Seize that boy!" cried the girl in Spanish, pointing at Dick.



# Fame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

*Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1908, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.*

No. 137.

NEW YORK, MAY 15, 1908.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

## DICK HADLEY'S MINE

OR,

## THE BOY GOLD DIGGERS OF MEXICO

By A SELF-MADE MAN

### CHAPTER I.

SEÑORITA PEPITA GONZALES.

"I'm afraid we're in a bad fix, fellows," said Dick Hadley, as he stopped and looked around.

"Looks as if we're lost, for fair," remarked Sam Swift.

"That's what it does," chimed in Charley Ross.

Dick, Sam, and Charley, were three good-looking and uncommonly bright American boys.

But it is a strange place we find them in on this hot July afternoon.

They were on the soil of northern Mexico, in the western part of the State of Chihuahua, hundreds of miles away from their native stamping-grounds—good old New York, where they were born and brought up.

The landscape surrounding them was hard and mountainous, and lonesome enough to satisfy any hermit who delighted in isolating himself from the haunts of mankind.

Two weeks before, the high school they attended closed for the long summer vacation, and the three boys proceeded to carry out a plan already cut and dried between them.

This was to join Sam Swift's father, who was a civil engineer and railroad contractor in Chihuahua, Mexico, where he was superintending the construction of a branch line of the Mexican Central, the most important railroad company in the republic.

This branch was surveyed from the capital of the State westward into the Sierra Madre Range, and beyond.

About fifty miles of the road had already been built, and it was proceeding as fast as circumstances would permit.

Work was going on through a break in the range when the boys arrived on the scene; after a few days of sightseeing in the city of Chihuahua.

Mr. Swift was duly cognizant of their coming, and had prepared for their stay, the length of which, within the scope of their vacation, depended on themselves.

After spending several days in the immediate vicinity of the railroad tracks, the boys began to make short excursions into the neighborhood.

They had been cautioned by Mr. Swift not to go far away in any direction, particularly among the foothills, and the boys tried to follow his advice.

On the present occasion they had wandered into a rather romantic-looking defile which brought them out into a valley of some extent.

As the afternoon was young, they had started northward up the valley, taking frequent rests under the shade of isolated trees along their route.

After a couple of hours' rest they decided they had gone far enough, and began to retrace their steps.

When they judged that they were approaching the defile, they began to keep a sharp lookout for it.

They expected to have no difficulty in finding it, as they had carefully noted its general aspect before walking away from it.

Although the defile was still in the same place, the boys failed to see it when they came near it, and actually passed it without recognizing the landmarks they had taken note of.

After walking half a mile to the southwest of it they began to grow uneasy.



After spending another hour looking in vain for the defile, Dick Hadley, the most manly-looking of the three boys, made the remark with which our story opens.

"We must have passed the blamed old place," said Sam.

"Then we'd better go back and look more carefully," said Dick.

"I don't see how we could have missed it," growled Charley.

"Well, I do," replied Sam. "We have come across half a dozen blind breaks in the range that look exactly like the entrance to the ravine. If we're going to get out of here before dark we'll have to hustle."

"Nice kind of weather to hustle in," said Charley, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. "It's as hot as blue blazes."

"It's hot enough, all right," grinned Dick, who seemed the least affected by the sun, "but you must expect that in Mexico."

"I ain't kicking so much about the heat itself as at the idea of hustling," grunted Charley. "I simply can't hustle. I'm going to take a rest under this tree, if we never get out of the range."

"The trouble with you, Charley," said Sam, "is that you were born lazy."

"I deny it," protested Ross. "I'm no lazier than you are, but I've got more fat on my bones. I expect by the time we're ready to go home there'll be nothing but a grease spot left of me."

"Don't worry, Charley. You are getting yourself into condition for winter football. You'll be able to run a hundred yards in something like record time, which you've never been able to accomplish before. This Mexican trip will make a man of you," chuckled Sam.

"Say!—cut it out, will you? Your remarks make me weary!"

The boys fanned themselves with their hats, and finally stretched themselves out on the patch of green under the big tree.

Fifteen minutes passed, and the sultriness of the air was making the boys drowsy, when the tinkle, tinkle of a number of silvery-toned bells reached their ears.

"Hello! What's that?" exclaimed Dick, sitting up and looking in the direction of the sound.

Sam partly raised himself on his elbow, while Charley merely rolled over on his side, as if the exertion of getting up was too much for him.

Coming toward them, up the edge of the valley, were two burros.

On the one in advance a dark, handsome Senorita, of about sixteen years, was perched with careless ease.

A broad-brimmed, steeple-crowned hat was set jauntily upon her raven-black hair, which flowed, unrestrained, down her back.

A navy-blue Eton waist, with sleeves that reached only to her elbows, but partly concealed the bosom of her white gown, which was encircled at the waist by a brilliant-hued scarf, and reached just to the tops of her long, dainty booties.

On the burro behind her was mounted a long-limbed Mexican peon, in native attire.

"Gee! She's a beaut!" said Sam, with not a little interest in his tones.

"Yes, she's as pretty as a peach," said Dick. "I must stop them, and see if I can find out where we are at."

"What's the use?" replied Sam. "You can't speak the Mexican or Spanish lingo. How are you going to make yourself understood?"

"Maybe she can speak English."

"I doubt it," said Sam.

"No harm in trying, at any rate. We want to find our way out of this valley."

The girl observed the three boys under the tree, and looked at them with considerable curiosity.

Dick got on his feet and walked over to head off the burros.

The Senorita, seeing that he wanted to address her, drew rein and waited for him to come up, and the peon behind also came to a stop.

"Good-afternoon, miss," said Dick, raising his hat politely.

The girl smiled in a coquettish way.

"Americano?" she replied, in silvery accents.

"Yes, we're Americans, all right," he answered. "Do you speak English?"

"Muy poco; pero lo entiendo bastante," she replied, in Spanish, which might be translated: "Very little; but I understand it pretty well."

However, her answer was pure Greek to Dick, and his countenance showed it.

"Ah, Senor, you not understand?" she said, with a captivating smile.

"Not a word," replied Dick, shaking his head.

Whether she understood his words or not, she easily guessed their meaning, and smiled again.

"What you do here, Senor?" she asked him.

"We have lost our way, miss," he replied.

She looked puzzled for a moment, and then brightened up.

"Si! You have lose yourselves? Where you come from?"

"Railroad," responded the boy, thinking she might understand the word.

Evidently she did, for she repeated the word and pointed south.

Dick nodded.

Sam and Charley were watching the interview with some interest, and seemed to think that their companion was getting on swimmingly.

The Senorita hardly took her eyes off Dick's face.

The young American was also much impressed with the Mexican beauty.

"We want to find the ravine that will take us out of this valley," said Dick.

The Senorita, although she had claimed to understand English pretty well, did not seem to grasp his meaning.

"What is Senor's name?" she asked.

"My name is Dick Hadley."

The girl repeated the name twice, and then said:

"My name Senorita Pepita Gonzales."

Dick bowed, and said he was pleased to make her acquaintance.

She laughed gaily.

"The Senor and"—she waved her arm at Dick's companions—"friends will come to mi padre's hacienda?"



Dick understood this to be an invitation to visit the home of her father.

He decided to accept it, as anything was preferable to remaining where they were, with a dubious chance of getting out of the valley before dark.

So he nodded his head.

The Senorita seemed pleased, and favored him with one of her most coquettish glances.

"Come on, fellows! Fall in with the procession!" said Dick to his friends.

Sam and Charley rose to their feet.

"Is the young lady going to show us the way to the ravine?" asked Sam.

"No. She's given us an invitation to visit her home," replied Dick.

"Where does she live?"

"Blessed if I know; but we'll soon find out. Where is your padre's hacienda, Senorita?" he asked the girl.

She waved her arm toward the other side of the valley.

"She lives somewhere over yonder," said Dick to his companions.

"If we go over there we'll never get back to the railroad without a guide," said Sam. "And not before long after dark, any way."

"What's the difference?" said Dick. "They'll probably ask us to stay all night. Then in the morning somebody will show us the way back."

"But my governor will be in a stew over our not turning up. He'll think we're lost, and will send out men to hunt for us," said Sam.

"Well, I don't see how we can help going with this young lady. She understands that we've lost our way, and that we came from the railroad, but I can't make her understand that we are looking for the ravine that leads out of the valley."

"Gee! It's tough to be lost in a land where a fellow has got to have an interpreter to make himself understood," growled Sam.

"If we could speak a little Spanish we'd be all right."

"Shoot the Spanish! If she could speak English it would be better."

"She speaks some English, which is much better than if she didn't speak any at all. Come on! I'll introduce you to her."

Dick brought his friends up to the Senorita and presented them to her.

"Senorita Gonzales, this is my friend, Sam Swift."

The girl smiled sweetly and nodded.

Dick went through the same ceremony with Charley Ross.

"Senor Dick Hadley, you will walk with me," said Pepita, with a look that showed she preferred his company.

She touched up her burro, and the party started across the valley, Dick walking by the girl's side, while Sam and Charley fell in behind between her and the mounted peon who acted as her attendant.

## CHAPTER II.

### AT THE OLD HACIENDA.

The Senorita started to chat in a vivacious way with Dick, correcting herself when she lapsed into Spanish, as she frequently did, in moments of forgetfulness.

The boy found her English sufficiently understandable for him to make fairly good headway with her.

She pointed out various objects around the valley, and called them by their Spanish names, and Dick repeated them after her till he got the sound in his head.

Sometimes she laughed at his mispronunciation, and sometimes she didn't.

One thing seemed to be certain: she had evidently taken a great fancy to him, and was using all her feminine arts to fascinate him.

It was impossible for Dick to be insensible of her many charms, and it looked as if it was becoming a case of "spoons" between them.

The valley was not so very wide at this point, and the party came to a stop under a clump of trees among the foothills of the western spur of the range.

Sam and Charley were glad of the chance to get out of the sun again, and they threw themselves upon the ground to take things easy.

Dick did not desert the fair Senorita's side, but remained talking with her.

They were beginning to understand each other pretty well by this time, and were quite content to be together.

The peon dismounted from his burro and let the beast wander about, nibbling the grass, while he seated himself under a tree, rolled a cigarette, and began to smoke, in the indolent way characteristic of his race.

The sun disappeared behind the range in the west, but that fact didn't make the air any less sultry.

"Dick seems to be stuck on Miss Gonzales," grinned Sam to Charley.

"Well, she seems to be mashed on him, too," replied Sam.

"She's a swell-looking girl, all right," said Sam, glancing over at the Senorita.

"And she thinks a whole lot of herself, bet your life!"

"Pretty girls generally do."

"I'll bet a dollar she's laying herself out to get Dick clean gone on her and then to-morrow she'll give him the cold drop."

"What's the odds? We're not going to remain long in this neighborhood, so it won't do either of them any good to fall in love."

"He's liable to talk of nothing but her all the way back to New York."

"Oh, I don't know. He'll forget her after he's seen the last of her."

At that moment Pepita spoke to the peon in Spanish.

Her attendant, whose name was Manuel, got up, caught and mounted his burro.

"Come on, fellows!" cried Dick. "Get a move on! We're going to start on!"

Sam and Charley obeyed rather reluctantly, for the shade of the trees suited them best.

The procession followed a well-beaten track in among the foothills, and the valley was soon lost sight of.

After a while they came to a long defile which wound in and out through the range, and finally landed them in another valley, much smaller than the one they had left, and full of vegetation and trees.

In the distance they saw a cluster of houses, chiefly built of cane, with sides not over four feet high, and roofs rising to an altitude of anywhere from ten to twenty feet.



They were sometimes almost hidden amidst coffee bushes, tall mango trees, and plants covered with flowers of every hue.

It seemed to be a small village.

Towering above the houses rose the stone front of an ancient-looking church.

It looked quite imposing from a distance, with its belfry rising above the entrance.

The boys subsequently discovered that the church itself was but a miserable adobe edifice, roofed in with the same material with which the roofs of the cottages were composed.

The stone front was merely a bluff to catch the eye, but in that respect did not greatly differ from hundreds of similar religious buildings scattered throughout Mexico, many of which are several hundred years old.

Half a mile to the right was a long cactus grove, and toward that Pepita turned her burro.

"My father's hacienda," said the Senorita, waving her hand toward the grove.

Dick looked in that direction, but didn't see any sign of a habitation.

"I don't see it," he said to her.

"Beyond the cactus," she replied.

As they passed along the boys saw brown women busy with their household tasks, and brown children playing around the straggling cottages.

Brown men were working in the coffee grove, and in the other fields, or driving burros laden with bags filled with some kind of produce.

The natives regarded the boys with some curiosity as they passed along, while the boys themselves regarded the natives and their habitations with interest.

As they drew near the cactus grove one of the Mexican priests suddenly appeared from behind the singular-looking plants.

He wore a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, much like those worn by old-fashioned Quakers, and a long black gown.

His walk was slow and sedate.

Pepita, who had been chattering like a magpie, oblivious of the fact that Dick could hardly keep track of the drift of her talk, became silent and demure the moment she caught sight of the reverend father.

The padre made a slight motion with his hand as he passed, at the same time regarding Dick and his companions with a keen look, and Pepita and Manuel bowed their heads with deep respect.

The boys recognized the man as a Catholic priest, and when Sam and Charley saw Dick raise his hat respectfully, they did likewise.

"When you're in Rome you must do as the Romans do," grinned Sam, after the padre had passed.

They were now close to the grove.

It was truly a formidable kind of wall that cut off the front view of the hacienda.

The cactus bore a tree-like form, in which the thick stem sustained a head of branches, and reached between 30 and 40 feet from the ground.

They were covered with thick, sharp spears, that were capable of inflicting an ugly wound on man or beast who monkeyed with them.

A lane through the grove admitted the party into an open space beyond, where the boys saw the hacienda before them.

It consisted of a long, low pile of buildings, bearing a faded and ancient appearance, as if they had been constructed in the time of the Flood, as Sam remarked to Charley.

As a matter of fact, those buildings were over 400 years old, and the church in the little village beyond was just as old.

Before reaching the hacienda Pepita extended her hand to Dick and leaped lightly from her saddle.

Manuel then took charge of the burro and led him off to one side.

"So this is where you live, Senorita?" said Dick, gazing at the rambling structure.

"Si, Senor Dick. You may call me Pepita, if you wish," she said, with a languishing glance into his sunburned and manly face.

Dick flushed under her gaze, but made no remark.

The girl was unconsciously spoiling her chances with the young American.

Had she been shy in her manner, using only her eyes to entrap the boy, Dick would have been hopelessly in love with her by that time, and would have moved heaven and earth to make himself solid with her; but to see her throwing herself at him rather cheapened her in his eyes, though he was greatly taken with her, just the same.

A swarthy-looking Mexican, close on to fifty years of age, came out of the main entrance, and Pepita introduced him to Dick as her father, and afterward to Sam and Charley.

He welcomed the boys in a hospitable way, for he spoke good English, and invited them inside, where they were made acquainted with Senora Gonzales, a stout little woman, somewhat resembling her daughter.

Dick explained how they came to be in Mexico, as guests of Engineer Swift, who was building the Mexican Central branch, and how they had entered the long valley early that afternoon and couldn't get out again.

Senor Gonzales smiled, and said he was glad his daughter had brought them to the hacienda, as it would give him much pleasure to offer them the freedom of his home for as long a time as they cared to stay.

"Oh, we'll have to get back as soon as possible," replied Dick, after thanking him for his generous offer, "for Mr. Swift has no idea where we are, and will be worried over our absence."

"Make yourselves easy on that score," said Senor Gonzales. "I will send one of my men right away to the place where the railroad is being built, to tell Senor Swift that you will remain here as my guests, for a week at least."

"A week!" exclaimed Dick. "Do you want us to stay so long as that?"

"You are welcome to remain a month, if you choose," replied the Mexican, in so hearty a tone that the lads were willing to believe that he was in earnest.

The boys found that, outside of the furniture, which was plain and substantial, there was little in the way of ornamentation to the rooms.

A religious picture or two was all that set off the walls of the rooms they had access to during their visit.



The first meal they were treated to was supper, with a few extra dishes for their benefit, dinner being served in the middle of the day.

When they were called to the dining-room, Pepita told Dick to take her in, and she saw to it that he had a seat beside her.

Sam and Charley sat opposite them, and they sent many a sly grin across the table at their companion.

As the boys were hungry after their afternoon's tramp, they got away with about everything set before them, and found that things tasted first rate.

After supper all hands adjourned to the best room in the house, the floor of which was covered by shiny white tiles.

Here, again, Pepita managed to have Dick by her side.

When the moon rose above the range the Senorita enticed Dick for a walk in the courtyard, or garden, and, as far as actions could go, she made love to him.

When the hour for retiring came around the three boys were shown to a large bedroom on the second floor, at the end of the hacienda nearest the village.

A cot had been provided in addition to the bed, and Charley Ross elected to use it while Dick and Sam selected the bed.

The boys, not feeling sleepy, sat by the open window, in the rays of the moonlight, talking about old times as well as the novelty of their present position.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GHOSTLY BELLRINGER.

The night was very quiet, not a sound of any kind breaking the stillness of the air.

The villagers had gone to rest more than two hours before, and the family and servants of the hacienda were already asleep.

As a matter of fact, there was hardly any one awake but the three boys.

"Eleven o'clock," said Dick, after consulting his watch. "Let's turn in."

His suggestion was about to be followed when suddenly, through the calm air, rang out the clang! clang! of the bell in the belfry of the church.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sam. "That's the church bell! Do they have religious services at this hour?"

They stood by the window and listened to the sound, which was very irregular—sometimes a dozen strokes in rapid succession, then a pause of uncertain duration, after which the bell would toll slowly and mournfully, as if for a funeral.

"That's the oddest bell-ringing I ever listened to," said Charley Ross.

"I'd like to go over to the village and see what's going on," said Sam.

"So would I," answered Dick.

"I'd like to go, too. Couldn't we manage it some way?" said Charley. "There's a ladder standing over yonder. One of us could jump down into the yard and place that ladder under this window; then, when we got back, we could return to the room without any trouble."

The idea appealed to Sam and Dick, but the latter hesitated about adopting it, as he had doubts as to the propriety

of their leaving the room in that fashion since they were guests of the house.

In the meantime the bell continued to ring in a jerky fashion, as if the person who was operating the rope had drunk a liberal quantity of something stronger than water.

Before the boys had decided whether to get out of the house or not, it became apparent to their ears that there was a commotion in and about the hacienda.

Everybody in the house had been aroused from their sleep by the bell, and the boys could see a number of the servants running toward the cactus grove.

"Looks as if there might be something wrong," said Dick.

"Maybe one of the houses in the village is on fire," said Sam.

"If it was, we'd see the blaze by this time, for this window faces the village."

"Well, the people of this place have been awakened, and they seem to be excited. There's something unusual going on, bet your life," said Charley, wagging his head.

"Looks that way. Here comes Senor Gonzales. I'm going to ask him what is the matter," said Dick.

Accordingly he hailed the proprietor of the hacienda, and inquired what the bell was ringing for.

Senor Gonzales answered that it was a mystery to him, but he was going to the village to inquire into the matter.

"May we go with you?" asked Dick.

Senor Gonzales said they could come, if they wanted to.

"We'll get out through this window. It's the quickest way," replied Dick.

One after another they dropped into the courtyard and joined the Senor.

When they reached the outside of the grove they found all the women servants gathered there, looking toward the church, which stood like a white specter in the moonlight.

The men folks were on their way toward the edifice.

Already a considerable crowd of the villagers were gathered in front of the church looking up at the belfry.

Apparently the ringing of the bell, which still proceeded at intervals, in a weird kind of fashion, puzzled and excited them.

When Senor Gonzales and the boys reached the church they found the whole village assembled in the square in front of the building, looking up at the belfry in an awe-struck way.

The padre was there, too, and he seemed as much rattled as the crowd behind him.

The bell, which had been silent for a while, now commenced to peal solemnly forth once more, one clang at a time, with an interval between, like a dirge for the dead.

The villagers were saturated with superstition, and as they knew the church door was locked, and the rear door of the sacristy, also, and that the sexton, who was the only one authorized to pull the bell-rope, was standing alongside the priest, looking white and scared, they immediately concluded that supernatural influences were at work within the church, and they were greatly disturbed at the idea.

Never within the memory of the oldest inhabitant had such a remarkable circumstance happened before, and all were fearful that it foreboded some great misfortune to the village.

Every time the ghostly bellringer clanged the bell chills



ran up and down the villagers' backs, and goose flesh rose on them.

The church was dark; every door and window was closed tight. Seemingly, no one had entered it, and yet the old bell continued to clang at irregular intervals.

It was certainly grewsome.

While Senor Gonzales went to the padre and talked with him, the boys pushed their way to the front of the crowd and gazed up at the belfry, like the rest.

Although they did not comprehend the situation fully, they could easily see that there was some mystery about the ringing of the bell.

The villagers looked frightened over it, and even the padre seemed at a loss to account for the phenomenon, and was actually afraid to investigate the matter.

"Say! This beats the Dutch, doesn't it?" said Sam, wonderingly. "There must be somebody inside the church. The bell couldn't ring itself."

"It's a wonder the padre wouldn't go inside and find out," said Charley. "He oughtn't to be afraid of anything connected with the church."

"Let's go around to the rear of the building and see if we can get in and find out what the trouble is," suggested Dick.

His companions agreed to go around to the back of the church, but were not quite sure that they wanted to enter the edifice.

When they reached the door of the sacristy and found it locked, they came back by the other side.

Dick walked up to the main entrance and tried the door.

It was secure, all right.

At that moment the bell donged out again.

In the meantime, Senor Gonzales had been trying to persuade the padre to unlock the front door.

The priest finally mustered up courage enough to consent.

He sent the sexton for a lantern.

When that individual returned, with shaking steps, the priest walked up to the door, thrust the big iron key into the lock, and opened the door.

The moonlight flooded the vestibule of the church and fell against the curtains hanging across the arched entrance into the body of the edifice.

The padre entered the building slowly and cautiously, followed by Senor Gonzales, and the sexton, with the lighted lantern.

The three boys took the liberty of following them, for they were eager to discover the solution of the mysterious bellringing, which they ascribed to some natural means.

The padre opened a side door into a small room, where the bell-rope hung, and, taking the lantern from the trembling sexton's hand, flashed it in.

The rope hung quite motionless, and the bell above was silent.

A long ladder led upward through a hole in the ceiling.

Suddenly the rope moved of itself, and the bell tolled out twice.

The sexton uttered a yell of terror and fled.

The padre uttered a gasp, and looked livid, while the lantern fell from his nerveless grasp.

Dick stepped forward, picked up the lantern and entered the small room.

Clearly no human being was there; yet the three boys had seen the rope shake and move up and down.

"Whoever is ringing the bell is concealed in the loft or in the belfry," said Dick to Sam, who had followed him in. "I dare you to accompany me up there."

Sam scratched his head dubiously, and glanced up at the dark hole.

"I'm going up, any way, whether you come or not," said the plucky boy. "I don't believe in ghostly bellringers. There is a natural cause for every effect."

He put his foot on the first round and started up.

Sam, ashamed to let him go alone, followed on behind.

Charley concluded to be one of the procession, too.

Up the three went, without hindrance from the padre or the Senor, who watched them disappear through the opening into the loft.

The padre was astonished at the nerve of the young gringos, as he called them, while Senor Gonzales admired their courage.

Both awaited results in breathless suspense.

When Dick poked the lantern, and then his head, through the hole into the low loft, he saw at a glance that it was quite empty.

"There's no one in this place," he said to Sam. "The intruder must be hiding in the belfry."

He stepped into the loft and waited till his companions joined him.

A short flight of steps pointed the way to the open belfry above.

Sam and Charley waited for Dick to make the next move.

To tell the truth, although the two boys were not cowards, neither of them was particularly anxious to take the lead.

Dick laid hold of the hanging bell-rope.

As he did so he felt it shiver in his grasp several times.

Suddenly it was pulled upward a bit, then it slipped back, and the bell tolled.

Dick immediately sprang up the steps, holding the lantern in front of him.

As his head and shoulders rose in the belfry something white, armed with claws, flew at the lantern, and the bell tolled again.

Dick was startled, and fell back against Sam.

The latter lost his balance, and toppled over upon Charley, and with a crash the three boys landed on the floor of the loft in a heap.

The noise reached the padre and Senor Gonzales, below, and they looked upward in anxious suspense.

They probably expected to see the three venturesome boys come tumbling down the ladder, but if so, they were disappointed.

"What did you upset me for?" growled Sam to Dick. "What did you see?"

"Oh, lor'! My leg is twisted!" groaned Charley, as the three pulled themselves apart.

"Something white flew at me," replied Dick.

"Something white?" said Sam. "Did it look like a ghost?"

"A ghost! Nonsense! Whatever it was, it hit the lantern a whack that made the glass rattle. I'm going back to see what it is," said Dick, resolutely.



This time he did not rush up the steps, but made his way to the belfry, with some caution.

When he poked the lantern and his head into the place nothing happened.

The belfry was perfectly still, and lit up by the rays of the moon.

Dick glanced at the bell, and then he saw a white object hanging to a loose strand of the bell-rope.

It looked to be about two feet long, and it dangled from the rope like a wet rag.

The boy flashed the light on it, and saw that it was a huge condor.

The bird had been caught by the strand of rope, frayed by long years of use.

The strand was strong enough to hold the great bird captive, and in its struggles to free itself it had rung the bell.

The condor was quite dead now.

In its attack on the lantern it had burst a blood-vessel.

Dick laughed when he saw the explanation of the mystery before him, and called to Sam and Charley to come up and see the spook that had rung the bell.

They came, and were astonished at the sight of the huge dead bird.

"So this is the mysterious bellringer?" said Sam, as they examined the defunct bird with much interest.

"That's right," replied Dick. "He was a powerful bird. Look at his wings and huge claws. Every time he made an effort to fly he pulled the bell-rope down and clanged the bell. When I came up here he was at his last gasp, but he had strength enough left to make one final spring at the lantern."

"What shall we do with him—leave him hanging here, as an object lesson for the padre and his assistant, who bolted just before we came up here, to look at?" asked Sam.

"I think I'll appropriate him, as a reward for venturing up here and solving the mystery. He'll look fine, stuffed and mounted, in my room at home," said Dick.

"Better have the padre come up here and look at him, before you cut him down, so he can explain to the villagers that the bell was not rung by any supernatural agency," advised Sam.

Dick agreed to that, and Charley was sent downstairs to tell Senor Gonzales and the padre to come up.

Charley's story, translated to the priest by Senor Gonzales, inspired the padre with courage enough to venture up into the belfry with the hacienda proprietor.

The sight of the dead condor's predicament satisfied the priest.

He consented to Dick taking possession of the bird as a reward for his courage.

The party then returned to the ground, Dick bearing his prize in triumph, which, at the padre's request, he exhibited to the villagers, who crowded around him to gaze upon it.

Senor Gonzales and the boys then returned to the hacienda.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A STRANGE CRY FOR HELP.

Pepita and her mother were up, and waiting to hear the news from the village, when they got back to the house.

Senor Gonzales told the whole story in Spanish to his wife and daughter, and the girl and her mother looked at Dick with considerable admiration, for he was regarded as the hero of the affair.

When Dick and his friends returned to their room they carried the condor with them.

"He's a dandy bird," Dick said. "Senor Gonzales says Manuel is something of a taxidermist, and will stuff him in good style for me. Get hold of that wing, Sam, and we'll see how big he is, spread out."

Sam grasped the bird, and they spread his wings to their fullest extent.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dick. "What's this? There's a paper tied under this wing!"

"He's a carrier bird, I guess," remarked Sam, on seeing the folded paper where it was secured by a stout piece of string.

"Bosh!" said Dick. "There are carrier pigeons, but no such things as carrier condors."

"Somebody must have attached that paper to his wing for a purpose," said Sam.

"Probably it's a joke," replied Dick.

He got out his knife and cut the paper free.

Then he opened it and looked at it.

It contained words written in an uncertain kind of way, which Dick saw were English, and he proceeded to try and decipher the strange message.

This was what he finally made out:

"Help! I am alone, and dying, in the heart of the western spur of the Sierra Madre, about 100 miles north from the course of the new railroad line. If this should reach a friendly eye, I beg that person to come to me without loss of time, and he shall not regret it, for I have the means of rewarding him generously. It is one chance in a thousand I am taking, in intrusting this message to a wild condor, but perhaps a kindly Providence will guide him in the right direction, and I may then see a human being once more before I die.

JOHN CARDEN."

Dick was astonished at the contents of the note, which appeared to be of the most urgent character.

He immediately read it out to his companions.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"Looks as if the writer was in a pretty bad fix somewhere in the mountains," said Sam. "He wants help at once. It's a question how long ago this was written."

"It's a strange kind of a way to send such a note out, tied under the wing of a wild condor," said Charley. "Doesn't look as if there'd be one chance in a million of anybody getting it."

"The one chance in the million has materialized," said Dick, "for the note has come into my hands."

"There's no date on it," said Sam. "How do you know but it's been months attached to that bird?"

"Or years?" chipped in Charley.

"It hasn't been long in the condor's possession," replied Dick in a positive tone.

"I don't see how you can tell that," replied Sam.

"Easily enough. It looks fresh. If the bird had carried it any length of time it would be soiled and weather-marked."



"That's so," admitted Charley. "You've got a great head, Dick."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Sam.

"Nothing to-night. In the morning I'll show it to Senor Gonzales, and see what he says about it. He is probably familiar with the range, and may be able to locate the spot where this John Carden is. We can organize an expedition for the man's relief. It will be quite an adventure for the three of us."

"It will suit me, all right," said Sam, eagerly.

"And me, too," chimed in Charley.

"Yes, we are looking for something to keep us alive down here in this beastly republic," said Dick.

"That's right," nodded Sam. "We want to have a whole lot to tell the boys when we get back. The more adventures we have down here the better it will be."

"We want our trip to read like a story-book," grinned Charley.

The condor was set aside, the important note put carefully away in Dick's wallet, and then they turned in for the night, and were soon asleep.

Breakfast was on the table, waiting for them, when they walked downstairs next morning.

Pepita had been dreaming about Dick all night, and she welcomed him with a warmth that somewhat embarrassed while it flattered him.

After the meal the girl wanted to take Dick off with her somewhere, but he asked to be excused, as he had business with her father.

She seemed a bit piqued at this, for she did not think that any business was important enough to stand between her and the boy she had taken a fancy to.

Dick showed John Carden's letter to Senor Gonzales, and told him how he had found it under the wing of the dead condor.

The Senor could not make the writing out very well, so Dick read it to him.

"Looks like a serious matter, doesn't it?" said the boy.

Senor Gonzales admitted that it had that look.

"Where is the western spur of the range?" asked Dick.

The Mexican told him that the writer of the note probably referred to a certain spur of the mountain which projected from the western line of the Sierra Madre.

He knew of such a spur about ninety miles to the north of the hacienda.

"That must be the place, then," said Dick. "Don't you think we had better get up a small expedition and go to this man's assistance?"

Senor Gonzales considered a moment, and then said he would send his overseer and another man to hunt Carden up, and see what help he needed.

"We want to go along, too," said Dick.

"It would be a rough journey for you through the mountains," said the Senor. "I don't think you would like it."

Dick insisted that he and his friends would like it first rate.

"We came to Mexico to see all we could of the country," he added, "and such a chance to explore the Sierra Madre Range we don't want to miss."

Senor Gonzales shrugged his shoulders, and said they could go if they wanted to.

"I will instruct Pedro to look out for you," he said.

Then he sent for his overseer, whom he introduced to the boys as Pedro Pacheco.

He translated the gist of John Carden's letter to him, and said he was to make an effort to find the man.

Pedro showed no indication as to whether he liked the job or not.

He raised no objection to making the trip, at any rate, for he was accustomed to obeying all orders without question that he received from the proprietor of the hacienda.

Preparations were made at once for starting on the journey.

As soon as Pepita heard of the proposed expedition she tried to persuade Dick to remain at the hacienda with her and let his friends accompany Pedro.

Dick couldn't see it that way.

Pepita and the hacienda were all right when there was nothing more exciting on the program, but the girl's influence was not strong enough to make a slave of him.

When she found that her hold on him was not strong enough to prevent him from embarking on the journey she got angry, and they had quite a quarrel.

Then she asked her father if she couldn't go with the expedition.

The Senor said no in a very decided way, and Pepita went to her room in a sulky mood.

The boys didn't see her again until dinner time, when she appeared at the table, looking more bewitching than ever.

She proceeded to make up with Dick, and treated him in her most winning way.

Possibly she thought she might weaken his resolution at the last moment.

If so, she was disappointed, for Dick was full of enthusiasm over the trip on which the party was to set out immediately after dinner.

Half an hour after the meal was over Dick and his friends bade Pepita and her father and mother a temporary goodbye, got astride of the burros provided for them by the owner of the hacienda, and followed Pedro Pacheco and a peon, who were similarly mounted, up through a pocket of the little valley, toward the rise of the Sierra Madre Range.

## CHAPTER V.

### SEARCHING FOR JOHN CARDEN.

They were soon in the mountains, the trail leading upward through wild and picturesque ravines, by the side of turbulent streams that flowed over rocky beds, passing under a cascade that looked like a sheet of shimmering glass, and anon skirting some projecting promontory by a narrow and venturesome path, where a misstep by one of the burros would have pitched his rider to certain death, hundreds of feet below.

"That's enough to give a fellow the nightmare," said Sam, who was riding behind Dick, for they were proceeding in single file, as they circled one of the promontories mentioned. "S'pose one of our burros stumbled anywhere along that place—just think what would happen!"

"Don't lose your nerve, Sam," said Dick, over his shoulder. "You may need it all before we reach the spur we're going to."

"I'll bet your nerves tingled just now when we were on



that narrow path," retorted Sam. "I can stand as much as you."

"How did Charley get through the trip?"

"Blessed if I know. I haven't heard a squeal out of him. I guess he kept his eyes shut so he wouldn't get rattled."

The procession was led by Pedro, while the stolid-looking brown peon brought up in the rear, the three boys being between them.

The scenery was not always such as commanded their pleased attention.

Sometimes it was hard and monotonous, shrubs and trees only being met with at intervals.

During these stages the sun beat down on them with an intensity that parched their throats, and the glare was unpleasant to their eyes.

The trail they were following was perfectly familiar to Pedro, who had often been over it, and he thought nothing of its perils, nor even of its beauties.

They had ascended to a considerable elevation, and had covered many miles from the hacienda, when the sky took on a peculiar look.

Clouds, gathering behind them, began advancing rapidly and spreading themselves over the heavens at a rapid rate.

Pedro had noticed these unpropitious signs, and hastened his pace, which the burros of the others at once fell into.

"Looks as if we were going to be caught in a storm," Dick said to Sam, who was close behind him.

"That's what it does, and I don't fancy the idea of it. There seems to be thunder and lightning in those clouds. It would be fierce to be caught in such a storm up here, where there seems to be no shelter of any kind," replied Sam.

Fifteen minutes later the clouds had mounted as far as the zenith, and the boys heard the rumbling of the thunder quite clearly, and saw the opaque masses streaked here and there with lurid zigzag flashes of electricity.

From the appearance of the atmosphere miles in their rear, it seemed to be raining cats and dogs in that quarter, and it was only a question of a little time before they would be treated to a similar ducking.

The worst feature of the approaching storm seemed to be the wind it was bringing with it.

Judging from the speed of the clouds, it was evidently of a high velocity.

To be caught in such a wind where they were was one of the most perilous features of mountain traveling, for it was liable to sweep them, burros and all, down the slope that lay on one side of them.

None knew this fact better than Pedro, and he was aiming for a certain cavern, where he intended to halt for the evening meal and pass the night.

Fortunately for the party, it was not far away, and the overseer got the best gait he could out of the animals in order to outstrip the storm.

The burros were sure-footed beasts, and whether they ambled along, or trotted at a quick pace, they never made a misstep.

The storm was swooping down upon the party when a turn in the trail brought them in sight of the cavern, that looked like a black hole in the mountain side.

The howling and shrieking of the onrushing wind was

in the ears of the boys as Pedro dismounted from his burro, outside the cave, and ordered the others to enter.

Two minutes later it seemed to the boys as if all nature had broken loose and was whooping things up like a party of cowboys on a rampage.

Although still an hour before sundown, the air had darkened to a kind of deep twilight, but this gloom was almost continually lit up by the terrifying flashes of lightning that kept the heavens ablaze like a gigantic conflagration.

"Talk about thunder," said Sam, "I've never heard anything like it in the worst thunderstorm I've ever seen. Seems as if the mountains were falling to pieces all around us."

"Yes, it's pretty fierce," Dick admitted. "It will be something to talk about when we get home."

"We'll never be able to describe this storm," said Sam. "It must be seen to be appreciated."

"What are you looking so solemn about, Charley?" asked Dick. "Afraid of the thunder and lightning?"

"Well, I don't like it," replied Ross, frankly. "Oh, Lor'! What a crash that was! Do you think we'll ever get out of this alive?"

"Why not? We're safe enough, I guess, in this place."

While the storm was at its height Pedro produced some of the provisions they had brought with them, and with a lantern to partially illuminate the back of the cave, they made a satisfactory meal.

The storm was over in about two hours, and when the sky cleared and the moon rose over the summit of the eastern range, the party spread blankets on the stony floor of the cavern and turned in for the night.

At the first blush of daylight Pedro aroused the boys, who found breakfast waiting for them.

No time was lost in resuming the journey, as it was desirable to cover as much ground as possible in the cool of the early morning.

Travel that day was much easier than during the preceding afternoon, and they met with no particularly dangerous places.

When night overtook them once more they were within sight of the western spur alluded to in the appealing letter of John Carden.

They reached the spur next day, about noon, and then began the search for the particular spot where the man was presumed to be, either dead or alive.

Many difficulties were now encountered.

Pedro had never been through this spur, and he had to feel his way.

"It's like hunting for a needle in a haystack to find a lone man in this wilderness," said Dick.

"What do you suppose brought Carden out to such a Lord-forsaken place as these mountains?" asked Sam.

"I suppose he is a prospector, hunting for gold and silver," replied Dick.

"I should think that was a mighty risky and uncertain business," interjected Charley.

"It's a paying business if you make a lucky strike," said Dick.

"I wouldn't mind finding a gold mine myself," grinned Sam.

"What would you do with it if you did find such a thing?" asked Charley.

"Dig the gold out, of course."



"A nice job you'd have doing it. Why, you couldn't tell a piece of gold quartz if you saw it," chuckled Charley.

"Couldn't I? That's as much as you know about it. I've seen gold quartz, and I know what it looks like."

"All gold quartz doesn't look alike."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know that much."

"You think you know a whole lot," sniffed Sam.

"There's more silver in this country than gold, any way. There are silver mines scattered all over Mexico, some of which are said to be the richest in the world."

"There is plenty of gold, too," said Dick. "I've heard that it has been found chiefly on the west side of the Sierra Madre."

"That's where we are now," said Charley.

"I saw it stated in a newspaper article, once, that until the discovery of gold in Australia, Mexico's yield of the metal surpassed the product of any other part of the world. However, you're quite right in saying that more silver has been found in this country than gold, Charley. The proportion, I believe, is about ninety per cent."

"As gold is worth twice as much as silver, I'd sooner own a small gold mine than a big silver one," said Charley.

"So you think this Carden we're in search of is a prospector?" said Sam.

"I do; and I also think he's struck luck," replied Dick.

"How so?"

"He says in his note that he has the means of rewarding any one generously who comes to his aid. That looks to me as if he has discovered rich ore out here in these wilds."

"Then, if we find him, we all stand a chance of getting a bag full of gold or silver quartz—is that it?" asked Sam.

"I couldn't say exactly," replied Dick, "but we'll no doubt get well paid for coming away out here, provided, of course, that we find John Carden."

"I'd sell my share of the reward pretty cheap," said Sam, "for I don't see how we're going to find him, except by accident."

The party stopped for rest and dinner at a shady grove of trees on the side of the mountain.

A fire was built and some coffee prepared.

A number of potatoes were baked in their jackets, in the hot ashes, and this, with cold meat and a supply of fruit, constituted their *al fresco* meal.

Pedro and the peon rolled cigarettes and lighted them, while the boys stretched themselves out on the patch of soft turf.

An hour passed, and then Dick awoke from a cat nap.

His companions were asleep; so, also, were Pedro and the brown man.

"I guess I'll take a look around and see what I can see," said Dick to himself.

He got up, lazily stretched himself, and walked off.

He did not intend to go very far, for fear he might lose track of the party.

He followed a path that he could easily retrace at any time.

The general view from that altitude was one of rugged grandeur.

A hundred yards took him out of sight of his sleeping companions, and then he found himself quite alone.

No matter where he looked, whether to the right or left,

front, or back, or downward, there was nothing to be seen but Nature, in her most lonesome garb.

Rocks, trees, shrubs, and mountainous elevations, there were a-plenty, but a house, or even the rudest kind of shack, was not to be seen.

There wasn't even an animal or bird of any kind, much less the figure of a man.

"I wouldn't like to be lost out here," muttered the boy. "My name would be Tim Flynn, for fair. I'd never see good old New York again, but some day my bones, and such bits of my clothing as were left, might be discovered by some wandering Greaser who happened to come this way."

He stepped out to the edge of a narrow promontory, on which grew a lone tree, the better to look down into a gully that ran at an acute angle toward a deep break in the mountains.

As he grasped the trunk of the tree and leaned forward the ground suddenly caved from under him, and he felt himself falling.

He uttered an involuntary cry of terror, and threw both arms around the tree to save himself.

As his weight came upon the tree its roots began to yield, for they had been undermined by years of rainstorms.

Dick struggled desperately to regain a footing on the top of the promontory again.

The more he exerted himself the lower the tree bent and shivered.

Had the excited boy been a bit cooler he might have avoided the catastrophe which followed.

But he bent all his energies on the tree, like a drowning man grasping at a small and unsubstantial board.

The result was the tree could not stand the strain, and gave way, carrying Dick down with it into the gully.

His voice rang out shrill and clear on the still air, and reached the ears of Pedro, who had just awakened from his siesta.

But owing to the way the rocks deflected the sound, it seemed to come from a different direction to what it really did.

The Mexican sprang to his feet and listened, but the cry was not repeated.

Then he glanced over where the boys lay, and saw that Dick Hadley was missing.

## CHAPTER VI.

### JOHN CARDEN'S HEIR.

Fortunately for Dick, the tree swung around, and fell under instead of on top of him; and the branches helped, in a large way, to break his fall on striking the inclined gully.

The shock, however, dazed him, but did not shake off his convulsive hold on the trunk.

The tree slid down the smooth side of the gully as if it was in a chute, and the half-unconscious boy went with it, clinging to it desperately, like some wild animal to its prey.

The gully wound its circuitous way around the mountain side, and the tree and boy followed its course.

At some points it was so steep that the tree attained considerable speed, which carried it over level places on its route.



In this way Dick was borne a long distance down the mountain, until at last the gully ended a short distance behind a good-sized log house which was perched upon a low section of the range.

There were signs of much broken ground near it, and a hole of some little depth.

These excavations had evidently been made by the hand of man, for the earth was thrown up in heaps about them.

The tree slid out of the gully on to level ground and came to rest.

It was several moments before Dick seemed to be conscious that he was no longer railroading it down the mountain side.

Finally he let go of the tree and sat up.

"Gee! I wonder where I am?" he asked himself, as he began to look around. "It seems to me, after that fall, I had a mighty long slide down the mountain. I wonder how far I could have come? I'm afraid I'll never be able to find my way back to where I started from, in which case I'll be in a bad pickle. Pedro and the others may never be able to find me, and I stand a good chance of starving to death out here in the wilderness. That's a fierce prospect. However, there is no use of moping over it. I must be up and doing. I ought to be truly thankful that I am not injured in any way. If I had got a leg broken, or internal injuries, it would have been all up with me, for fair; but as nothing seems to be the matter with me, as far as I can see, I have a fighting chance to get out of my hole."

Dick was a plucky chap, and never allowed himself to be cast down by adverse circumstances.

He got on his feet, and then the first thing his eyes rested on was the house.

Much to his astonishment, a small American flag was waving in the breeze from a pole at the other end of the building.

It looked rusty and weather-stained, as if it had been there some time.

"I guess I've lighted on my feet, after all!" ejaculated the boy, with a thrill of hope. "A house, especially one with a flag flying from it, looks like the presence of civilization. An American flag, too!—means that one or more of my own countrymen are here. I shall have no trouble in explaining my situation, and will get food and shelter. This is certainly great luck."

Dick started toward the house.

Then he saw the piles of dirt, and the holes, with a shovel and a pickaxe thrown carelessly into one of them.

"These people are miners, that is clear. Perhaps they know something about John Carden."

As Dick uttered the man's name he stopped short, as if an idea had struck him.

"Maybe this is John Carden's stamping-ground, and I shall find him in the cabin," he said. "It must be so. As Pedro and the rest of our party are so near, they will probably find this spot before long, and everything will be all right."

As Dick looked more carefully around, the silence and general air of desolation began to impress him with the idea that if this was Carden's habitation he was either dead, or had so far recovered as to strike out for help on his own account.

Dick walked around to the front of the house.

The door stood slightly ajar.

The possibility that he might find a corpse inside was so unpleasant that for several moments he hesitated to enter the cabin.

At length he mustered up courage to do so.

The building consisted of one room only.

It was quite bare of any real furniture.

There was a rude kind of home-made table near the center of the room, beside which stood part of a thick log that had evidently been used for a stool.

A wide fireplace, built of stones, cemented with clay or mud, with a chimney of the same material, stood at the back of the cabin.

A charred log and a lot of partially burned tree limbs lay in it, amid a pile of dead ashes.

A heap of what appeared to be rock lay piled against one corner.

In the opposite corner was a rude couch, covered with blankets, and on the blankets lay the form of a man.

As far as Dick could judge, as he stood at the open door, the man was either in a deep sleep or dead.

"That must be John Carden," thought Dick, "and it looks as if the poor fellow was indeed dead. Well, I must make sure of it. It is possible he may still have some life in him."

He advanced slowly toward the couch.

As he drew near, he saw the man's hand move, and then his head, which was turned toward the wall, moved also.

"He is not dead," breathed Dick, thankfully. "I have arrived here in time to be of some assistance to him."

He reached the couch and looked down on the prostrate man.

The man turned his eyes up at him and essayed to speak, but the words died away in a whisper.

"Are you John Carden?" Dick asked him.

The man feebly nodded his head.

"You sent a letter for help, tied under the wing of a wild condor. I got the bird, read your note, and induced the proprietor of the hacienda where I and two friends of mine were stopping to send out a search party to find you. I came with the party, which is now somewhere near the summit of the range, within a mile or two of this spot."

Carden raised his hand and pointed to a shelf on which stood a demijohn.

Dick saw that he wanted it, and hastened to take it down.

He removed the stopper, and the odor told him that it contained whiskey.

There was an overturned tin cup on the floor beside the bed.

Dick picked it up, half filled it with whiskey, and poured some of it down Carden's throat.

It greatly revived him.

"Thank you, my boy," he said, gratefully, in a tone loud enough for Dick to hear.

"How long have you been ill?" Dick asked.

"About three weeks," Carden replied, "but I managed to keep on my feet until the day before yesterday, when I gave in completely. Nothing has passed my lips in forty-eight hours."

"If there is anything in the house I can cook or prepare for you, let me know," said Dick.



"There are some canned goods on yonder shelf which may be of use to you and your friends, but I am past eating. I have only a few hours to live, at the outside, and shall want nothing but an occasional sup of whiskey to keep my strength up to the last."

"You may not be as bad as you think," replied Dick, trying to encourage him.

"There is no hope for me at all. I am as good as a dead man. But it is a satisfaction to me that some one has reached me before I died. Bring that log up and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Dick did as he requested.

"My name is John Carden. I hail from Sackville, New York State. I am a prospector and mining man. I came into these mountains six months ago, to follow up a clue I got from an old peon. With my knowledge of ore outcroppings I succeeded in spotting a rich golden lode. I staked it out according to the laws of Mexico, and took title to the richest part of this property on which this cabin stands. Give me another drink, my lad. I feel faint."

Dick poured more whiskey into the cup and put it to his lips.

His voice at once grew stronger and his eyes brighter.

"The documents attesting my rights, and fully defining the area of the ground, are filed in the proper office at Chihuahua, and no one can legally deprive me of the fruits of my discovery. Death, however, has a claim that no man can evade, and the gold that I expected to possess can never be mine now. Another drink, boy."

Dick supplied him with it.

"What is your name, my lad? You are an American, I believe."

"My name is Dick Hadley. I am an American, for I was born in New York City, and my home is there. I am spending my vacation down around the railroad with two of my friends and schoolmates. The father of one of them is the engineer who is building the new branch line of the Mexican Central. We were at a hacienda among the foothills of the Sierra Madre, spending a few days, when your letter asking for help came into my hands in the most wonderful way."

Dick, in as few words as possible, rehearsed the fate that had overtaken the condor that carried the prospector's note, and how he had got possession of the bird.

"It was the will of Heaven that I should not die utterly alone in the wilderness," said Carden.

Dick then explained how the party had set out for that section of the Sierra Madre two days since, and how he had come to meet with the accident that resulted in his appearance on the spot all by himself.

"You had a remarkable escape from death," said the prospector, "but it looks as if the hand of Providence had guided you here before I died. I shall probably be dead before your companions reach this place, so what I have to do must be done now and through you. This mining property is easily worth a million or more money. The only heir I have is a nephew, who is a great scamp, and I have no wish that this discovery should revert to him. The only way I can avoid his ultimately getting possession of it is to deed it over to somebody else. The last time I was in Chihuahua I had a presentiment that something might happen to me, and to guard against my property going to my

nephew I had a deed legally drawn up transferring all my rights in this property to any one I might deem worthy of the gift. I signed it in the presence of a notary, leaving the name of the recipient blank, to be filled in subsequently, if circumstances rendered such a course necessary. That paper is with the copies of my other papers, in those saddlebags at the foot of my couch. Go to the bag, my lad, and get it out, with a fountain-pen you will also find there, and I will insert your name in the paper, and this property will then become legally yours after you have filed the document in Chihuahua."

"Do you mean to say that you actually intend making me a present of this gold mine you have discovered?" cried Dick in astonishment.

"I do. Lose no time, but get the paper, so I can put your name in it, for I am growing much weaker, and soon I will be unable to hold the pen."

Dick, almost dazed by his great luck, hunted for the indicated document.

As soon as he found it, and got the stylographic penholder, he propped Carden up, and the prospector wrote Dick's name in the blank space with a trembling hand, but sufficiently clear to avoid any error.

"There!—the mine is your property—Dick Hadley's mine from this out, and no longer John Carden's. I congratulate you, my lad, on the acquisition of such a valuable property. Heaven meant you should have it, or you had not been guided here in such a wonderful way."

Dick expressed his gratitude for the favor which the dying man had bestowed on him.

"You are welcome to it, my boy. My message sent by the condor came into your hands in a way that assures me that you were selected to be my heir, and I have merely carried out the will of a Supreme Intelligence who doubtless knows that you will make good use of the money this mine will ultimately yield you."

After disposing of his mining property John Carden grew weaker as the moments passed, and after the lapse of an hour Dick saw that he could not live much longer.

The whiskey ceased to have much of a reviving effect upon him, for his vitality was now at a low ebb.

Finally he became unconscious, and Dick left his side and went to the door to look out, in a faint hope that he might see the rest of his own party somewhere in the neighborhood, looking for him.

As he stood there, looking down the slope, the sun vanished behind the distant mountain tops, and as it disappeared the breath left the body of John Carden.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TROUBLE.

"It's over five hours since I fell down that gully," thought Dick. "I think it is about time Pedro and the others made some progress toward finding me. It isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to have to remain all alone with a dead man in this lonesome spot, even if the dead man has made your fortune for you. Death is something that I don't like to be on close acquaintanceship with. It gives one a creepy feeling to watch over a corpse alone in a room in the midst of a busy city. It's a hundred times worse to perform the same duty out here in the silent wilds.



It will soon be dark now, and unless my party shows up pretty soon I'll have to give up all hope of seeing any of them till to-morrow."

At that moment an idea struck Dick.

If his friends failed to show up before dark he would build a bonfire to try and attract their attention.

With this idea in his head, the boy began to gather a pile of dry brush and branches of trees.

When the heap was ready for lighting he kept on at the work till he had secured a considerable extra supply of material to keep the fire going for a couple of hours.

By the time he had finished his labors he began to feel the gnawings of a healthy appetite, so he entered the cabin and inspected the supply of canned provisions the dead man had not used.

They were all American brands of preserved meats and vegetables, which Carden had bought in Chihuahua and brought out to his mine.

Dick selected a small tin of boned chicken, a couple of handfuls of crackers, and, taking the tin cup, went outside to where a stream of pure water flowed down the rocks.

There he sat on the ground and made a hearty meal of the provender.

By the time he had finished the darkness of night fell on the face of the landscape.

He lighted a lantern he found in the cabin and then started his bonfire.

The flames, after they got well started, leaped heavenward in a way that could not escape notice for miles around.

As the fire languished he fed it afresh, and kept up the work until the last of his reserve fuel was exhausted.

Then he gathered some more, determined to make a strong bid for the attention of his friends, if they were anywhere within sight of the blaze.

He kept at his self-imposed work until he grew weary, and laid down under a tree to seek repose for the night.

He was half asleep when he heard sounds as of persons approaching.

Sitting up, he looked around.

Four figures, mounted on burros, the last one leading a fifth animal, suddenly appeared out of the gloom close by.

Although Dick could not see them very distinctly, he guessed they were Pedro, the peon, and his two friends.

He sprang to his feet and rushed forward into the dying glare of the fire so they could see him.

Instantly he heard a shout from Sam and Charley.

"Hello, Dick!" they cried, springing from their burros and running up to him.

"Hello, chappies!" replied Dick, joyfully. "I'm mighty glad to see you again!"

"How the dickens did you get here, Dick?" asked Sam. "We thought you had tumbled down the other side of the mountain, and we've been looking for you all the afternoon."

"You'd never guess how I did get here, nor what I found when I reached the place."

"Tell us all about it," said Charley, eagerly.

Here Pedro came up and shook hands with him, saying something in Spanish which neither Dick nor his friends understood.

Dick then told how he had fallen from the top of the

promontory into the gully, and how the tree had borne him down the mountain side.

His friends thought he had had a pretty strenuous experience.

"This is the place we've been hunting for, fellows" concluded Dick.

"You mean John Carden's hangout?" said Sam.

"Yes."

"And where is Carden?"

"Dead."

"Dead!" repeated Sam. "Then we have arrived too late to be of any use to him."

"You have; but I got here before he died."

"Then he hasn't been dead long?"

"About four hours. He died shortly before sundown."

"Where is he—in the cabin?"

"Yes."

Dick managed to explain the situation to Pedro, and the entire party entered the house to look at the dead man.

Afterward Dick took Sam and Charley aside and told them about the mine and how it had come into his possession.

"Gee whiz! So you're actually the owner of this gold mine?" cried Sam, staring almost incredulously at Dick.

"That's what I am."

"How much do you think it's worth?"

"Carden said that it was easily worth a million."

"A million!" gurgled Charley. "And it's all yours?"

"Every bit of it."

"Well, talk about blind luck!" cried Sam. "You've fallen into the butter tub over head and heels. Going to sell it, I suppose?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do with it. I must see your father about it. He will be able to advise me what to do."

"Where's the gold Carden took out of it? He must have got some."

"There's a big pile of quartz-rock in the corner of the cabin, and one of Carden's saddle-bags is full of small nuggets of pure gold," replied Dick.

"Couldn't you let Charley and I do some digging on our own account, just to pay our expenses down here?" asked Sam, eagerly.

"Sure! I intended to give you a chance to make \$50,000 or \$100,000 apiece. I am not a hog, to want to keep it all to myself, even if it does belong to me," answered Dick, heartily.

"You're a brick, old man! You won't miss what we get away with."

"We'll stay here a few days and work the mine, and see how it pans out; then we will go to Chihuahua and I will file my claim to the mine, so I shall have no trouble about holding on to it," said Dick.

"How about Pedro and his side partner?" said Sam.

"After we bury Carden to-morrow they'll probably want to return to the hacienda right away. As soon as Pedro discovers that there is gold here he may put in a claim for a share of it."

"His claim won't count for anything. However, I'm willing to give him some of the gold ore to keep him from making any trouble for me."

The boys talked a while longer about the mine and then



returned to the cabin, where they found Pedro and his companion already asleep on the floor.

They followed the example of the Mexicans, and did not awaken until they were aroused in the morning by the overseer, who told them breakfast was ready.

After the meal Pedro went nosing about the place.

He looked into the big hole dug by the dead prospector and afterward examined the specimens of ore in the cabin.

He was about to investigate the contents of the saddle-bags, when Dick interfered, and told him that the dead man had given him all his property before he died.

The Mexican grinned unpleasantly and walked off.

He returned with the peon, and pointing to some empty bags, told the native to fill them with the gold ore in the corner.

Dick said nothing till Pedro told the peon to take the bags outside; then he told the Mexican that the ore was his property, and that he would make him a present of one of the bags, but no more.

Pedro regarded him with an ugly look and ordered the peon to proceed.

Dick called Sam and Charley to his side, and told Pedro plainly enough that he would report him to Senor Gonzales if he didn't leave all but a single bag of the ore alone.

Pedro half drew an ugly-looking knife from his belt, but after a moment's reflection turned his back on the boys and went outside, calling the peon with him.

The two retired to a short distance and had a talk.

"Looks as if we're likely to have trouble with the overseer," said Sam, apprehensively.

Dick thought so, too.

As they were unarmed, and both Mexicans had knives, it looked as if the latter possessed a decided advantage over them.

"If we only had a revolver or rifle now, we could stand them off, in case it came to a scrap," said Sam. "Didn't Carden have any weapons?"

"I don't know," replied Dick.

"Let's look and see, while those chaps are outside," suggested Charley.

They took up the saddle-bags, and found a holster with a brace of loaded revolvers in them.

"Now we're safe," said Sam, as he lifted the holster up.

"Here's a gun," said Charley, pulling a magazine rifle of American make from under the bed, together with a cartridge belt fully supplied with cartridges.

Dick took possession of the rifle and the other boys put a revolver apiece in their belts.

"Now we are in a position to defend the ore," said Sam.

"Mr. Pedro will have to take a back seat."

At this moment Pedro and the peon returned to the cabin.

The Mexican looked primed for business.

He gave Dick to understand that he claimed the ore and was going to take it.

Dick denied his right to it.

Pedro grinned in a sinister way and tapped his knife.

Dick then picked up the rifle, whereupon the Mexican started back with an ugly frown.

For a moment the opposing sides appeared to be at a deadlock.

"I settle for half," said Pedro, at length.

"No," replied Dick. "I'll give you two bags of ore and call it square."

The Mexican was not inclined to accept that kind of compromise.

He began to threaten Dick in Spanish.

Although the boys did not understand his words, they easily understood his meaning.

Dick showed by his plucky demeanor that he did not propose to be bulldozed.

Finding that he was making no headway, Pedro went outside again with the peon, and they held another consultation.

Pedro then returned and demanded four bags, one of them for the peon.

Dick said he could have three, but that was the limit.

The Mexican seemed to give in, and ordered his comrade to remove three of the bags.

"We come back presently and help bury man," said Pedro, as the peon carried out the last of the three bags.

Dick nodded, and the boys began to converse together as to their future plans.

"I wonder what's keeping those chaps so long," said Dick, at length. "Let's go out and see."

The boys walked outside and discovered that Pedro, the peon, and the five burros had vanished.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A JEALOUS BEAUTY.

"Looks as if they'd skipped out and left us to shift for ourselves," said Dick.

"And taken the burros with them!" ejaculated Sam.

"With the provisions!" gasped Charley. "We'll starve!"

"No, we won't starve," replied Dick. "There is a supply of canned goods in the cabin."

"Is there?" replied Charley, much relieved.

"Well, let them go. We won't miss them," said Dick.

"When Pedro gets back to the hacienda without us he'll have to give an explanation to Senor Gonzales. I guess he'll find out that he's up against it."

"He'll say we got lost somewhere in the mountains," said Sam. "That he hunted for us and couldn't find us."

"Then the senor will bring a party out to hunt us up. He'll consider himself responsible for our safety, for we are his guests. He notified your father that we were going to remain at his place for a week or two," said Dick.

Sam and Charley immediately recovered their spirits.

"We can have a dandy time camping out here by ourselves till Senor Gonzales comes after us," remarked Sam.

"We can put in our time digging for gold," interjected Charley, enthusiastically.

"The first thing we've got to do is to bury John Carden," said Dick.

"Let's do that right away," said Charley.

"No, we won't do it till sundown," answered Dick. "We can make our preparations, however. We've got to dig the grave in a suitable spot, and we ought to make some kind of a coffin to put him in. There may be enough boards in the bunk to answer that purpose. Let's hunt up a burial spot first—some place where he is not likely to be disturbed. Up the mountain, for instance, under the trees."



They ascended the mountain behind the cabin, and finally found a place that appeared to be just right for the solemn purpose.

With the pickaxe and shovel which they had brought along they dug a hole six feet in length, two and one-half feet wide, and about five feet deep.

Then they returned to the cabin.

Carden was lifted from the bunk and placed on the floor.

Dick found a hatchet and a can of nails.

He knocked the bunk to pieces and found it would afford boards enough to make a suitable box for the corpse.

In half an hour the coffin was ready.

It was lined with a blanket after a rest had been put in to hold up the dead prospector's head.

Carden, who was as rigid as a board now, was lifted in.

A large stone was then brought in and one end of the box placed upon it, while the other end rested on the log of wood which the dead man had used for a chair.

"We'll let him lie in state now till sundown," said Dick.

The boys then went outside and inspected the hole out of which Carden had dug his quartz.

Afterward they found that the prospector had secured his nuggets and gold dust out of the bed of a stream below.

The pan he had used to wash out the pay "dirt" was found standing against a tree with a few glittering specks still showing in the small quantity of sand that remained in it.

Sam and Charley were so anxious to get to work digging for gold quartz that they started in as soon as the property had been looked over, and Dick contented himself sitting under a tree and watching them perspire at the laborious job.

The two boys took turns in the hole, and each succeeded in getting out a small pile of the real stuff, much to their satisfaction.

For dinner the boys had canned corn beef, crackers and spring water, and although there was not much variety to the meal they were just as satisfied as though they had enjoyed a regular table d'hôte.

Dick wasn't quite sure that Pedro had actually deserted them.

He had a suspicion that the Mexican might be hiding a short distance away with the purpose of returning during the night when they were asleep, taking possession of their arms and the rest of the gold quartz.

While Sam and Charley resumed their digging after dinner he was considering how they would be able to guard against such a contingency.

He decided to bury the quartz somewhere up in the woods for safety's sake.

They couldn't take the stuff with them, anyway, on their first trip back, and it would be taking great chances of losing it by leaving it at the mercy of any wayfarer who might come that way while they were absent from the mine.

The digging soon became too hot work for Sam and Charley to continue long at, and they sought the shelter of the trees for a long rest.

About three o'clock Dick took a look at Carden and saw that his body showed signs of rapid decomposition.

He concluded that it was better to bury the prospector right away and not wait till sundown.

So he notified his friends that the interment had better be carried out immediately.

A second blanket was placed above the corpse and the cover nailed on the box.

They had quite a job carrying the box up to the grave, but they got it there at last, and with the aid of a board slid it down into its last resting place.

Dick, as chief mourner, said an impromptu prayer, while Sam and Charley stood by with their hats off.

As soon as the short service was over the hole was filled in and a mound raised on top.

A stone was placed at the foot of the grave, and a piece of board for a headstone on which Dick printed the name of "JOHN CARDEN" in big letters, with the words "Sackville, N. Y." under it.

Dick then looked around for a suitable spot to bury the bags of gold quartz.

He discovered a small cave in the rocks, and there the boys dug a hole deep enough to hide the bags, and covered them up, afterwards spreading a lot of brush over it to conceal the fact that an excavation had been made there.

Dick brought the saddlebags there, too, and covered them with brush.

He also left the rifle and cartridge-belt in the cave.

"Now, if Pedro returns to-night, expecting to catch us napping, he won't get much for his trouble," said Dick, in a tone of satisfaction.

The boys decided to keep watch, anyway, for part of the night to guard against a possible surprise.

They were not disturbed, however, and in the morning they concluded that Pedro had actually left them to their fate.

They decided to remain on the ground for a day or two longer and then set out for the hacienda, where they intended to report to Senor Gonzales the treatment they had received from Pedro.

Sam and Charley did not do any more digging until the sun got low down in the heavens, and then Dick joined them.

Dick was turning over some of the ore his friends had thrown out of the hole when the three were treated to a big surprise.

A steeple-crowned hat and then the face and lithe figure of Pepita Gonzales suddenly appeared up the slope in front of the cabin.

The girl looked around and then spied Dick, shovel in hand, tossing the gold quartz into a pile.

His back was towards her, but Sam, who rose out of the hole at that moment, saw her, and uttered an astonished exclamation as the girl ran forward.

She stopped a short distance off and looked at Dick with flashing eyes as he turned and recognized her.

"Why, Pepita!" he cried, in amazement. "You here!"

"Si, Senor Dick. I am here," she said, in a passionate tone. "See what I found in your room when you had gone."

She held up a photograph of a lovely blonde of seventeen.

It was the picture of Dick's girl in New York, which he had brought with him and had left it in the pocket of his light jacket at the hacienda, for the boys had started on their trip without their jackets, the warm weather rendering such a covering unnecessary.



Pepita, with feminine curiosity, had gone through Dick's jacket and found the photograph.

It was inscribed, "Yours lovingly, Jessie."

The Senorita, who was already madly infatuated with the young American, flew into a fit of jealous rage at the sight of the picture and the writing.

Here was a rival, and evidently a favored one.

And she realized that the girl was a beauty of an opposite type to herself.

She had always hated blondes, anyway, and now to find that one of that class seemed to have a hold on the boy of her choice made her simply furious.

Her first impulse was to throw the picture on the floor and crush it with her heel into a shapeless mass.

But she changed her mind like a flash.

She determined to save it and demand an explanation of Dick, forgetting that she had acquired no right to call him to task on such a subject.

Her impatience was such that she could not wait Dick's return from his trip.

Taking advantage of her father's unexpected absence to Chihuahua, she determined to set out with several peons to intercept Dick on his return from the western spur of the Sierra Madre.

She took this step unknown to her mother, who had very little control over her.

When she and her attendants reached the point in the range where the western spur jutted off, they camped to wait for Pedro and the boys to appear.

Two hours later the overseer and the peon came in sight with the five burros, three of them laden with the bags of quartz ore.

Pedro was taken aback when the daughter of his employer confronted him and demanded to know where the boys were.

His explanation was so lame that Pepita's suspicions were aroused, and she went for him like a small wildcat.

As a result Pedro admitted that he had left them at the cabin of the dead prospector, about twelve or fifteen hours' journey from that spot.

Pepita ordered him to lead her there at once.

As it was then growing dark, he agreed to set out on the trip next morning.

The girl was so impatient that she didn't want to wait, but the overseer said he would not undertake the journey at night.

Before beginning the trip he and the peon hid the bags of quartz in a cave near the trail, and then with the three burros in tow the party started for the location of the gold mine.

As soon as they reached the foot of the declivity Pepita handed her rifle to the overseer and ordered him and the rest of the party to remain there until she should call to them to come forward.

Then she rushed forward to have it out with Dick alone.

When she flourished the photograph of Dick's New York sweetheart in the air, the boy was astonished both at her words and actions.

The hot, jealous nature of the Mexican race blazed in the girl's eyes.

There was no more reason in her at that moment than might be expected of a crazy person.

She was a creature of impulse, accustomed to have her own way as a rule.

She had determined to win Dick at any cost, and the discovery that she had a rival in his affections had made her so furious that she was capable of going to any extreme to accomplish her object.

In fact, it is not unlikely had her fair rival been within her reach that she would not have hesitated to kill her.

"Who is this girl?" cried Pepita, fiercely. "Do you love her?"

"Why, what do you mean?" responded Dick, amazed at the girl's attitude.

"Do you love her?" screamed the enraged Senorita. "Answer me!" with an imperious stamp of her foot.

Sam and Charley gazed at her in open-mouthed bewilderment.

"Maybe I do," grinned Dick. "What of it?"

With a scream like an enraged tigress the girl tore the photograph into small pieces and flung them at Dick.

Then she stood glaring at him and clutching at the bosom of her dress.

"Why, Pepita, what is the matter with you?" the boy asked her.

Pepita stamped her foot angrily and uttered a shrill cry.

Immediately Pedro Pacheco, gun in hand, followed by two other Mexicans, appeared over the brow of the eminence.

"Seize that boy!" cried the girl in Spanish, pointing at Dick.

The overseer and the two peons advanced to do her bidding.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DICK HADLEY FINDS HIMSELF IN A PICKLE.

"Hold on there," cried Dick, raising the shovel and assuming a defensive attitude. "Why am I to be seized?"

Pedro raised the rifle and covered him.

Then he ordered the two peons to secure Dick.

"Here, I object to this kind of treatment," protested the boy.

Sam and Charley drew their revolvers to protect their companion, but the overseer cowed them with the rifle while the peons sprang upon Dick and made him their prisoner.

"Look here, Pepita, what is the meaning of this?" asked Dick, who could not help understanding that she was the cause of the trouble.

The girl turned her back on him and walked away.

Pedro told the peons to lead the boy to the cabin.

"You stay where you are!" he hissed to Sam and Charley.

As soon as Dick had been brought to the house Pepita turned upon him in a rage.

"You think to play with me, Senor Dick," she gritted. "You make love to me and yet you have another girl somewhere else that you say you love. You think I stand that? No, I kill you first!"

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Pepita? I never made love to you."

"Madre de Dios! Have not I ears and eyes?" she hissed. "You make me think I am all the world to you, and I give you my heart. Now you say you never make love. You shall marry me, or I will fix you. You think I will let



you go back to that other one—the girl with the—bah!—light hair and fair face? Never! Never shall you marry her! You belong to me, and I will have you or you shall die! Entiende?"

Dick was paralyzed.

There wasn't the least doubt but that the Senorita was thoroughly in earnest.

"You say I must marry you? You must be crazy!" said the boy.

"You refuse?" she cried, with flashing eyes.

"Why, of course, I refuse. I'm only a boy yet. What do I want to get married for? I've never thought about such a thing."

"Suppose I tell Pedro to shoot you if you will not marry me? he will do as I say."

"You wouldn't tell him to do any such thing."

"You do not know me, Senor Dick. You shall consent to marry me or you will regret it. I would rather see you dead than that any other girl should possess you."

"Why, your father and mother wouldn't let you marry me, anyway."

"Suppose I tell them that I kill myself if I do not marry, you think you they would refuse me? They know better."

"Why, you're too young to get married."

"I am of the age that we get married in Mexico. We are not cold-blooded like your gringo girls that are content to wait till any time. You will make me your answer at once. You will say that you will marry me, or you shall repent it."

If Dick had been temporarily taken with Pepita on account of her beauty and fascinating ways, he was now quite cured of his liking for her by her present deportment.

Her persistency in insisting that he marry her whether he wanted to or not had a tendency to make him lose respect for her.

At any rate, he was not a boy who could be bulldozed into doing what he didn't care to do.

"I didn't come to Mexico to get married," he said, impatiently. "Why, I ain't done my schooling yet."

"Will you marry me, or not?" she demanded, angrily.

"No. I don't intend to marry you or anybody else for some years yet."

She raised her hand as if about to strike him in the face, and then, changing her mind, she beckoned to Pedro, and they walked away a short distance.

"Pedro," she said in Spanish, "I must bring him to terms. I am determined to make him my husband. You understand?"

"Perfectly, Senorita. You wish my help?"

"Yes. If you can make him do as I wish I will reward you."

"Then leave the matter in my hands. He shall marry you whenever you wish him to, or I do not know what I am talking about," he replied, with a sinister smile.

The wily Mexican saw the opportunity that the case presented for him to do a little stroke of business on his own account, and he did not intend to let it slip.

"How will you manage it?" she asked, eagerly.

"That is for me to contrive, Senorita."

"You must not injure him. He is mine, and I will not have him hurt," she cried, impetuously.

"I will frighten him, that is all," replied the Mexican,

evasively. "If anything happens to him it will be his own fault, not mine. I must use strong measures with him, for he is a boy of much pluck. He will not easily be brought to terms, but, depend on it, he will consent to do as you wish him to before I am done."

"I should like to know what you intend to do," she asked.

"That I cannot as yet say. It will depend on circumstances. I know a cave where I mean to keep him a prisoner till he yields. I will leave him there with nothing to eat. Hunger will tame a wild animal, why not a gringo?"

"You swear that he will come to no harm?" said Pepita.

"I will swear that I will not lay a finger on him to his injury."

The girl seemed satisfied with that assurance, and told Pedro that she depended on him to make things come around as she wished to have them.

Pedro, on the morning he and his companion deserted the boys, had discovered a cave half a mile from that spot which had evidently once been the scene of a tragedy, for he had found a human skeleton in it.

He believed he knew how the man had met his death, and he determined that Dick Hadley should have a chance of experiencing the same torture.

His plan was to force the boy to give up all the gold quartz he had in his possession, and swear to keep away from the locality of the mine for good and all.

That was his main object in pretending to fall in with Pepita's plans.

He cared very little whether he helped the Senorita or not, for he had decided to leave her father's service and take possession of the dead prospector's mine.

As soon as his conference with the girl was ended he ordered his peon associate to bring up one of the burros.

Dick's arms were bound behind him and he was placed astride the animal.

The peon was directed to bring along the shovel the boy had been using at the time of his capture.

Pedro walked ahead while the peon led the animal.

Dick, astonished at the turn events had taken so unexpectedly, wondered where he was being taken to, and what purpose the overseer had in view.

Sam and Charley had attempted to interfere in Dick's behalf, but Pepita, who had taken possession of her rifle again, overawed them, while her two peons jumped in, overpowered and disarmed them.

They were forced up against a tree and tied to it, back to back, after which they were left to meditate over the extraordinary change in affairs.

Had this been Pedro's work alone, they would not have been so surprised, since they had evidence that he coveted the gold quartz; but the appearance of Pepita on the scene, so far away from her home, and her crazy attitude toward Dick, fairly dumfounded them.

She did not seem to be the same girl at all.

She had developed into a vengeful little spitfire.

In the meanwhile, Pedro led the way down the valley to a cavernous opening in the mountain side.

The burro was tied to a tree and Dick was lifted off his back by the peon and forced to enter the cave.

This proved to be a sort of vestibule to an inner and larger cavern, lighted by a great jagged hole in the roof, through which the sunlight forced its way in a straggling



fashion, as the opening was lined and arched over with bushes.

Directly under the break in the roof was a hole in the floor of the cave, about seven feet deep and several yards in circumference.

A stout limb of a tree, ten feet tall, shorn of its branches, stuck upright in the center of the hole.

Hanging in a heap at the foot of this pole, sustained by strands of rotten rope, was the skeleton of a man, partially attired in the remnants of a thin suit of clothing.

This grewsome object had evidently been in that pit for years.

That he was a victim of some horrid crime was sufficiently clear.

He had evidently been tied to the stake and then left to his fate.

At first sight it would have struck a beholder that he had perished miserably of starvation, but Pedro had a different idea from the presence of a thin stream of water which flowed down the rocks and ran across the floor of the cave, disappearing through a narrow subterranean opening, together with his knowledge of what had happened to another man under similar circumstances.

Whether he was right or not in his surmise was immaterial, and did not particularly interest him, since the conditions looked ripe for the scheme he had in his own mind in connection with Dick Hadley.

## CHAPTER X.

### FACE TO FACE WITH A HORRIBLE DEATH.

"What did you bring me here for?" demanded Dick, whose eyes, not yet accustomed to the partial gloom of the cavern, had not made out the skeleton at the bottom of the hole.

"To talk business," replied Pedro, significantly.

"What is the nature of your business?"

"Pepita wishes that you marry her."

"I can't help what she wishes."

"You will not do it, eh?"

"Not if I can help myself."

"Suppose you can't help yourself—what then?"

To this Dick made no reply.

"Since you do not care to marry her, there is a way for you to not do it."

The Mexican nonchalantly rolled a cigarette and lighted it.

"What do you mean?"

"You are in my power," said Pedro, blowing out a few rings of smoke that curled upward toward the opening in the roof and disappeared into the bushes. "Your friends cannot help you. If I choose to kill you in the way that I have selected no one will be the wiser."

The cool, unconcerned way in which he uttered the last sentence gave the boy a chill.

He had evidence that the overseer was a rascal at heart, and he knew that a Mexican of that stamp was capable of going to any extreme to accomplish his purpose.

He had been told that they valued life very lightly, and that the majority of the race had no great love for Americans, whom they sneeringly called gringos.

Here he was, a hundred miles out in the heart of the Sierra Madre Range.

It would be a simple matter for the Mexican to put him out of the way, throw his body into a nearby gully, and make off.

There wasn't one chance in a thousand that his body would ever be found and the crime brought home to the overseer, notwithstanding the sinister circumstances connecting Pedro with his disappearance.

His friends would, of course, report the facts to Mr. Swift, if they were allowed to go back to the railroad, and Pedro might be ultimately tracked down and arrested, but murder would have to be proved against him before he could be subjected to the extreme penalty of the Mexican law.

Besides, Dick had no more desire to die suddenly than any other healthy person who sees bright prospects ahead of him.

"I suppose I've got to admit that I'm in your power," replied Dick; "but Senor Gonzales, as well as John Swift, contractor for the Mexican Central Railroad, will hold you responsible for any wrong you may do me."

"Bah!" ejaculated Pedro, contemptuously. "I care that for them," and the Mexican snapped his fingers and blew out more rings of smoke. "Now, attend to me, young Senor. These are my terms for your life: The whole of that gold quartz which the dead miner dug out, and undisputed possession of the ground so that I may dig out as much more as I choose. You must swear to leave the country at once and never return, and you must swear to hold your tongue. Pepita, who is love-sick over you, will forget you after you are gone. I will, as a condition, see to it that she does not annoy you. These are not hard terms, since the gold quartz is not really yours. You took charge of it because the owner is dead. You could not carry it away, anyway, and if you could of what avail would it be to you? You would be cheated out of most of its value."

"The gold quartz and the mine as well is my property," said Dick.

"Your property!" cried Pedro, with a sarcastic smile.

"Yes. John Carden deeded it to me an hour before he died."

"You have a paper signed by him, then?" said the Mexican, looking hard at the boy.

"I have."

"You will give me that paper, too."

"I will not."

"Ha! Then you refuse the conditions on which I offer you your life?"

"I will consent to let you have all the quartz in sight on condition that you let me go."

"It is not for you to make terms, young Senor. I hold the upper hand. You will do as I say or—you die."

"You have no right to deprive me of the mine," protested Dick.

"I make the right," answered Pedro, with an unpleasant smile, rolling a fresh cigarette. "Mendez," turning to the peon, "search the boy's pockets for a paper."

"You wouldn't find any, for I haven't got it about me."

"It is at the cabin, then?"

"It is safe, where you never can find it," replied Dick, defiantly.



"You think to outwit me, eh?" said Pedro, lighting the second cigarette. "It is not possible. You shall tell me where you have put that paper."

"You can't make me do that."

"No, young Senor? We shall see. I will show you what is your fate if you make trouble for me. Bring him forward, Mendez. Let him look in the hole."

Dick was forced forward by the peon.

He instinctively gazed down into the excavation, which was of stone like the cave itself.

Then he saw the crumbling skeleton with its few shreds of clothing, and he could not repress a shudder at the sight.

"That man was once alive and full of strength like yourself, young Senor," said Pedro, in a crafty tone. "You see he is bound to the stake, which shows that he was put there to die. Why? you ask. Who shall say? Perhaps on account of a woman. Someone else also desired the woman, maybe, and he decoyed this man here and—well, you see the result. Perhaps it was some other reason. That concerns us not. The man is dead long since. How would you like that you take his place?"

Dick made no reply.

"We will see how you will like it for the moment. Perhaps it will help you to decide quickly how you shall save your life," said Pedro, with a cruel leer. "Mendez, jump into that hole and kick those bones from the pole."

The peon obeyed the overseer's command.

"So," said Pedro. "Come out. Lower the young Senor down and tie him tight to the same place."

It was useless for Dick to resist.

His arms were bound and he was at the mercy of his captors.

In two minutes he was in the hole and the peon, with fresh cord, was securing his chest to the pole.

Pedro puffed his cigarette and looked maliciously down at his victim.

"Kick those bones around his feet," he said to Mendez, and the peon did so.

"Now, you think it will feel nice to remain where you are till you become as that skeleton was, young Senor," said the Mexican, with a sinister smile.

"You are a cowardly villain to treat me this way," replied Dick, bitterly. "You would not dare give me a chance for my life on even terms."

"Am I not giving you all the chance you need?" grinned Pedro. "Tell me where I am to find that paper you spoke of, and swear you will leave this country without saying a word about this matter, and you shall go free as the air. I will help myself to the bags of quartz in the cabin without your permission."

"If I agreed to do as you want I have no guarantee that you would keep your part of the agreement. You would probably leave me here to perish, anyway, that you might make sure I would not afterward make trouble for you."

"I swear by all the saints I will let you go as soon as the paper is in my hands," replied Pedro.

"The word of a man capable of committing murder is not to be trusted."

The Mexican gritted his teeth at the boy's reply and looked at him savagely.

"You will agree to my terms or I shall leave you to your fate," he hissed. "You shall not only starve, but you shall

drown, too. See that rill of water running down the wall? It crosses this cave here and goes down a small hole in the rock yonder. It seems as nothing, but suppose I alter its course so that it shall run into the hole where you are? It will take two or three days to rise to your mouth, but it will get there, and all the time you will feel its cold embrace as it rises inch by inch. You will suffer the tortures of hunger first, and then you will be strangled so slowly that the halter will be as nothing to it. Does the prospect please you? Give me the clue to where I shall find that paper. Swear to leave the country. That is all I ask, then you will escape this trap you are in. Refuse, and we leave you not to return."

"You would not return in any case," replied Dick.

"Caramba! I say I would."

"I can't trust you."

"You must trust me or die!" gritted the Mexican.

"Will you let me go at once if I tell you?"

"No, the paper must first be in my hands."

"If you cannot trust my word I certainly can't trust yours."

"I am making the terms, not you."

"I refuse to agree to your terms."

"Then you shall die!" cried Pedro, fiercely.

"My death won't put the paper in your way."

"I care not. I will work the mine as I intended before you spoke of the paper."

"The paper wouldn't do you any good. It's in my name."

"That need not concern you. Once more I ask you if we are to come to terms?"

"I will make no bargain with you," replied Dick, resolutely.

With an imprecation, Pedro said something in Spanish to Mendez.

The peon took the shovel and went outside.

Presently he returned with a spadeful of earth.

He cast it over the channel of the rill and cut off its flow toward its subterranean retreat.

Then he got more earth till he had made a small embankment that turned the course of the water into the hole.

Dick soon saw it running down the rocky side of the excavation in which he was held a prisoner.

It began to gather in a small pool not far from the pile of bones around his feet.

The pool grew steadily larger and spread out toward him.

Pedro watched it with demoniacal satisfaction.

"You begin to understand what your fate will be, young Senor," he said, with a cruel laugh, as he rolled a third cigarette. "Yet you still have time to reconsider. Agree to my terms, and if I find the paper, Mendez shall return in less than an hour and release you, while the water shall resume its natural course at once."

"You have had my answer. Once you had that paper in your hands you would not return. I am sure of that. If you leave me here to perish you will be a murderer, and some day will have to account for your crime. That's all I've got to say to you. Go, if you intend to. I will put my trust in Heaven and take my chances."

"You are a fool!" gritted the Mexican. "I will leave you to your fate. Come, Mendez, let us go."

The two rascals immediately quitted the cave, and Dick was left to the silence and solitude of the wilderness.



## CHAPTER XI.

## IN WHICH SAM AND CHARLEY DISCUSS THE SITUATION.

It would not be easy to describe the sensations that filled the brain of Dick Hadley as the steps of the two rascals died away outside and he realized that he was alone and face to face with what appeared to be certain death.

The tenor of his thoughts were certainly far from pleasant, and yet had the Mexican returned and offered him another chance on the same terms his reply would have been the same.

To save his life he would have yielded up everything if he could have had faith in Pedro's word; but he believed that it would be more to the villain's interest to break his agreement than to keep it, and so he would not allow the man to have that much the better of him.

And yet to die, at his age and under such horrible circumstances, was a prospect enough to have appalled the stoutest heart.

He had time to consider the strange conduct of Pepita.

If she loved him, as her words and actions seemed to imply, would she let him perish thus miserably without making a strong effort to save him?

He did not think she would.

She had come all that distance out into the heart of the Sierra Madre to demand that he marry her.

He saw that the girl's hot, jealous nature had been stirred to its very depths by the picture of his American sweetheart, and that she was capable of going to extremes in order to carry her point.

Whatever arrangement she had made with Pedro he felt sure it did not embrace his death, and he wondered what the girl would say to the overseer when he returned to the cabin without him.

Then he wondered what Sam and Charley would do, provided they were free to act.

He was satisfied they would try to hunt him up.

This cavern was such a short distance from the mine that it seemed to him if they managed to strike the right trail they were bound to investigate it in their efforts to find him.

Dick began to notice that the cavern was growing more gloomy every moment.

This fact told him that the sun was far down beyond the mountain tops and that the darkness of night was rapidly approaching.

It would soon be as black as the ace of clubs in the cave, and that would make his position all the more terrible.

The chilly feeling around his feet called his attention to the fact that he was now standing in an inch or two of cold spring water, but his long boots would protect his lower limbs for some time yet, possibly all through the night, if no relief came.

At length the light faded entirely out of the cavern, and Dick was face to face with the horrors of a long night.

The moments went slowly by, as if held back by the hand of time, and all Dick could do was to think and ask himself if he really was slated to die.

When Pedro, accompanied by his associates in rascality, got back to the cabin, he found Pepita impatiently awaiting his return.

She was walking up and down in front of the building while the two peons who had accompanied her from the hacienda were lolling under a nearby tree smoking the inevitable cigarette.

Sam and Charley were still tied up to the tree, and they looked much dejected.

Pedro approached the girl with some trepidation.

Conscienceless rascal that he was, there was something about Pepita that overawed him.

He was a bit afraid of her when she was aroused.

"What have you done with Senor Dick?" she demanded in Spanish.

"He is quite safe, Senorita."

"Where did you take him?"

"To a certain place in the mountains."

"What place?" insisted the girl.

"It need not matter to you what place," replied the Mexican, doggedly.

"I want to know," she answered, sharply.

Pedro, however, refused to tell her.

"You have not harmed him?" she cried, her eyes beginning to flash.

"Why should I, Senorita? What have I against him? You are the one interested in bringing him to terms."

"Think you he will agree to marry me?"

"I think twenty-four hours of starvation will bring him around."

"You have him tied up in some place not far away?"

"Yes, Senorita."

"And what did you say to him?"

"That you were determined to make him marry you at any cost. That you would rather see him dead than that any other girl should have him."

"That is right. He shall not leave the country to return to that other girl whose picture I found in the pocket of his coat. He shall marry me or——"

"Well?" said Pedro, as Pepita stopped.

"No matter. I will see to-morrow. For to-night he shall think it over. In the morning he shall give me his answer. If he once more refuse he shall stay where he is until he agrees to do as I wish. Now we will have something to eat. Do you attend to that."

"We shall keep the other two boys tied up for the present, eh?"

"It is better that they should be where we can keep watch on them," she replied.

Pedro thought so, too, in order to avoid trouble with them.

Sam and Charley, when they saw the Mexican and his peon companion return without Dick, began to entertain fears that their companion had perhaps been made the victim of foul play.

Although they were tied so that they could not see each other, they were close enough to be able to carry on a conversation over their shoulders.

"What do you suppose those rascals have done with Dick?" Sam asked.

"How could I guess any better than you? Things look mighty serious, though, for him, in my opinion, and maybe for us, too, for all we can tell."

"You're right, it does, Charley. I can't understand the change that's taken place in that girl. That photograph of



Jessie Millwood, Dick's girl, seems to have been the cause of turning the Senorita into a regular fire-eater. Just think of her coming away out to this place, ninety miles from the hacienda, to have it out with Dick."

"Gee! I'm glad she didn't fall in love with me. These Mexican girls are altogether too strenuous to suit me."

"I should say they are, when they're jealous. I'd feel sorry for Jessie if she were here at this stage of the game. I don't think she'd escape alive."

"I'd like to know where Pedro carried Dick off to, and what he means to do with him if he hasn't already done something."

"So would I," replied Sam, in an anxious tone.

"It was an unlucky day that we got lost in that valley and ran across Pepita."

"It was that. I'm afraid this mine is not going to do Dick any good."

"No, nor us, either, which is tough, after all our anticipations of making a bank account out of it."

"This is a rotten country," said Sam, in a tone of disgust. "I don't see that we've had such a swell time since we came into it."

"Oh, things were going on all right up to this afternoon," replied Charley.

"They're pretty shaky just at present. I wonder how long we are to remain tied up to this tree. Pepita doesn't take the least notice of us. She doesn't seem to consider our feelings at all."

"If she fails to have her way with Dick she may take satisfaction out of us."

"I think she's taking it out of us anyway. When I get back to my old man I bet there'll be something doing if there's any law in Mexico."

"I hope so. I'd give a good deal to be within hailing distance of the railroad at this moment."

"My father has a pretty good pull with the officials of the Mexican Central. He'll make Rome howl to get justice. Pepita coming out here and raising all this racket is going to make trouble for the Senor, her father."

"You bet your life it is."

"The idea of her wanting to force Dick to marry her against his will! What would he do with a wife, anyway? He doesn't want one any more than we do. I wonder if all the Mexican girls are as hot-blooded as Pepita. If they are they must be a dangerous proposition to tackle. If one of them made a break for me like Pepita has for Dick, it would be me for the woods."

While the boys were talking the sun set and soon darkness fell upon the landscape.

Pedro and Mendez were in the cabin getting supper ready.

The sight of smoke issuing from the chimney made Sam remember that he had a stomach, and he and Charley began to speculate as to the chances of anything in the edible line coming their way.

At length Pedro appeared at the door of the cabin and called Pepita inside.

The two peons who had come with the girl squatted outside and Mendez presently brought them a mess of something to satisfy their appetites.

No one seemed to pay any attention to Sam and Charley,

and as the moments slipped away their hopes of getting any supper began to grow beautifully less.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DICK MAKES HIS ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN.

It must not be supposed that a plucky lad like Dick Hadley would yield passively to the terrible fate that confronted him.

But as the water gathered around his feet, and he could feel it gradually rising up his bootlegs, a feeling of desperation seized him and he began to struggle with his bonds.

Although the cords showed no signs of yielding to any great extent, the pole lost its original firmness and moved about with the motions of his body.

He soon noticed this fact, and began to direct his energies on it, moving it back and forth and from side to side.

Finally it became so loose that Dick, grasping it with his hands, lifted it entirely out of the hole.

A thrill of hope encouraged him now, and he proceeded to slowly pull up the pole, inch by inch, with his fingers.

In half an hour he got hold of the bottom of it, but then his efforts came to a standstill.

He could not get it up any higher, owing to the fact that his arms were bound.

The weight of the pole, however, caused it to sag over, and the moment he let go of the bottom end it fell over against the top of the hole in which he was a prisoner.

Dick then tried different tactics to get rid of it.

He stooped down slowly again and again in an effort to slide out from under the pole, as the cords holding him to it were now fairly loose.

Unfortunately, the pole followed the motions of his body and stuck to him like a leech.

Foiled in his attempts to get away from it, he began turning around as rapidly as he could, which caused the pole to swing around in a circle, brushing against the edge of the hole.

There was a break in the rocky edge of the hole at one point.

As long as Dick swung the pole with some rapidity it passed over this break, but when, as he grew exhausted by his efforts, its speed relaxed to a spasmodic swing, it slipped into the break and caught.

The rocky cleft held it with sufficient firmness for Dick to take advantage of his chance to pull away from the pole altogether.

Although free of the pole, his position was not greatly improved, for his bound arms prevented him from pulling himself out of the excavation.

The only real advantage he had secured was ability to move at will around the circumscribed space of the hole.

After resting himself from his late exertions he began to devote his entire attention to the rope that secured his arms.

He pulled and tugged at it in every imaginable way, but though it gave some it did not become sufficiently loose for him to withdraw one of his arms.

The water was now about three inches deep in the hole, and Dick realized that fact as he splashed about in it.

With great persistency he worked the fingers of one hand



up to the other arm until he succeeded in grasping one of the cords that bound him.

His object now was to try and work that cord down his arm.

Fifteen minutes later his arms were free, and he gave a sigh of satisfaction.

To escape from the excavation was not a difficult matter now.

He pulled the pole down from where it was caught in the crevice in the rocks, placed it at an angle against the side of the hole and shinned up to the top.

Then he lost no time feeling his way out of the cavern, and soon stood a free boy under the brilliant, star-lit heavens.

"Nobody can tell how good it feels to be boss of his own actions till he has been through such a deal as I have just weathered. I thought at one time that it was all up with me. I guess I had a close call, all right. If the three of us get back to New York in good shape I'll have a story to tell that would make a newspaper reporter gasp. Now, the question is, what am I going to do? The mine is in possession of that rascally Pedro and his villainous associate, Mendez. Sam and Charley may be prisoners. As for Pepita and her peons, I must consider them my enemies, too, in spite of the fact that she claims to be dead gone on me. I'm as hungry as a hunter, and as Pedro and the others are in possession of the cabin where our provisions are, I don't see how I'm going to feed. I can't live on air, so I'm afraid I'm in a very serious scrape, any way, notwithstanding the awful predicament from which I have just escaped."

He sat for half an hour on a rock in the moonlight and tried to figure out how he was going to get something to eat, but he couldn't reach a solution of the difficulty.

"Well, I must return to the mine and see how things are getting on there. I must take care that I'm not seen by the enemy, or I'll surely be made a prisoner again, and it's pretty certain that Pedro would take special pains that I didn't escape a second time."

So Dick started for the cabin, taking a roundabout course that would bring him to the back of the building.

When he reached the locality of the mine there was no sign of life in the neighborhood of the cabin.

"Can it be that Pedro, Pepita and the rest have left the place, taking Sam and Charley with them?" Dick asked himself, as he cautiously drew near the house. "Or are they all asleep in the cabin?"

The latter idea seemed the more probable, for Dick scarcely believed that Pedro would leave the mine so quick as that.

On his return to the place after leaving Dick in the cavern, the boy judged that he had gone into the cabin to take possession of the remaining bags of gold quartz.

Of course he didn't find them, for, as the reader knows, Dick and his friends had buried them in the little cave up the mountain side.

"I'll bet when he found the quartz missing that he tried to force Sam or Charley to tell him where the bags were hidden," said Dick, as he stood gazing at the cabin, which looked silent and deserted in the moonlight. "The question is, were they intimidated into telling him? I can find that out by running up to the cave."

Dick made his way to the little cave and found every-

thing just as he and his companions had left it, so he was satisfied that the quartz was still there.

He returned to the back of the cabin and took fresh observations.

After satisfying himself that no one was about on the outside of the building, he cautiously approached the front door.

It stood half open.

Dick got down on his hands and knees, and crawling up to the entrance looked in.

He could make out nothing, owing to the gloom which enveloped the room, but he heard the deep breathing of a number of sleepers.

Removing his boots he entered the cabin in his stocking feet, and soon located the positions of several of the sleepers.

Mendez and the other two peons were curled up near the doorway.

Pepita, Pedro and his two friends he judged to be at the far end of the room.

Passing the sleeping peons like a shadow, he found no difficulty in reaching the shelf where the canned stuff stood.

Selecting the nearest three cans, he made his escape as softly as he had entered.

When he got outside he resumed his boots and retired up to the little cave.

Concealing two of the cans in the underbrush, he opened the other with the aid of a stone and found it contained canned beef.

He got away with half of the contents of the can before his hunger was appeased.

After washing his meal down with a drink of water, he secured his rifle and the cartridge belt, and continued on up the mountain till he found a secluded spot among the trees.

There he lay down and was soon asleep.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### IN WHICH DICK PLAYS A MARCH ON PEDRO PACHECO.

When Dick awoke next morning it was broad daylight.

He walked back to the cave and made his breakfast off the remainder of the meat in the can he had opened the night before.

Then he slipped down the mountain side to a point where he could overlook the site of the mine.

Smoke was issuing from the chimney of the cabin, which told him that some cooking was under way.

Pedro and Pepita were standing near the door talking.

Neither his friends nor the three peons were in sight.

While he was watching the girl and the overseer, Mendez came to the door and said something to them.

They broke off their conversation and entered the cabin.

"Gone in to eat, I guess," thought Dick.

While Dick was watching for further developments he saw Pepita's two peons appear, leading quite a bunch of burros.

He counted them and found there were ten altogether.

"Why, where did the two extra ones come from?" the boy muttered. "We had five animals, then Pepita's party brought three, which makes eight. That's all that were around here yesterday afternoon. I don't see any strangers on the scene to account for the other pair. By George!



Those two must have belonged to Carden. I knew he couldn't be out here without one animal, at least. He must have had his burros staked somewhere that there's grass and water for them to subsist on. The peons found the place and tethered the other burros there, too. That seems quite clear."

The peons tied the burros under a tree and then entered the cabin.

After the lapse of perhaps a quarter of an hour Pedro came out of the house, followed by two of the peons leading Sam and Charley.

They were marched over to a tree and tied up as before.

The natives retired to a short distance, and throwing themselves on the ground, rolled and lighted cigarettes.

Pedro remained with Sam and Charley, and was evidently holding an argument with them.

Dick had a good view of the trio, and he wondered if the conversation related to the bags of gold quartz.

As a matter of fact, that was what Pedro was questioning the two boys about.

Neither Sam nor Charley would oblige him with the information.

The boys were game, however, and so the Mexican made no headway with them.

Finally he quit them and started to look around on his own account.

He particularly examined the ground at the back of the cabin to see if it showed signs of having been dug into.

Then he went into the house and looked the floor all over for similar signs.

He was disappointed on all sides, and returned to where Sam and Charley were bound to the tree.

"Look here, young Senors, if you refuse to tell me where those bags of quartz are hidden, I will leave you both bound to this tree when we go away. How will that suit you, eh?"

"You wouldn't dare do that," replied Sam.

"No?" replied the Mexican, with an unpleasant smile. "You try me too far and see what I dare do. Your companion, Senor Dick, is now learning what I dare to do. He refused to accept my terms and is taking the consequences."

"What did you do to him?"

"No matter. That is only for him to know. I did not myself lay a finger on him. I had sworn that I would not harm him," he said, with a malicious grin. "I put him where he could not get away. By and by I will see him again. Perhaps by that time he will consent to change his mind and do as I want. If he does you shall all go free, but you must also leave the country with him and swear to hold your tongues."

"Well, we're not going to tell you anything unless Dick says so. Take us to him and let him decide the matter. If he's willing to make a bargain with you to save us all from further trouble, we won't kick. He knows where the quartz is hidden. As it belongs to him you must do business with him. We're not going to give anything away without his knowledge and consent."

"You talk very brave, young Senor," replied Pedro, with a sneer. "Before I turn the screw on you I will see Senor Dick and find if he is more reasonable this morning. If he says what I wish it will not be necessary that I hold further talk with you. If he still acts the fool—caramba!

I fix all three of you so that you never leave these mountains."

Thus speaking, the overseer walked off rolling a cigarette, which he lighted and then approached Pepita.

After a short talk with the girl three burros were detached from the bunch, the Señorita mounted one, Pedro and Mendez the other two, and the party set off down the declivity in the direction of the cavern where Dick had been left a prisoner.

The two remaining peons continued to loll and smoke under the trees.

Dick decided that now was the time for him to act while the enemy was divided.

He came down the mountain side and suddenly appeared before Sam and Charley.

The two boys were both astonished and delighted at his unexpected appearance.

With his sharp jackknife he cut his companions free.

The two peons were unsuspecting of what was going on so close at hand, and the three boys sought the shelter of the back of the cabin before they noticed that anything had happened.

"Now," said Dick, in a business-like tone, "the first thing we've got to do is to secure those two Greasers and tie them up so they'll be helpless. We'll work around behind the trees and take them by surprise."

Dick had the rope in his hands with which Sam and Charley had been tied up, for he intended to use it for putting the two peons in the same predicament.

The boys approached the two Mexicans so cautiously that the men were not aware of their presence until Sam and Dick, each selecting a victim, sprang upon them.

A struggle, of course, ensued, but the boys were strong and determined, and with the help of Charley soon had the peons gagged, bound and secured to the tree under which they had been resting.

"Now, then, Sam, go up to the cave where we buried the quartz and bring down the saddlebags. I'm not going to disturb the ore-bags. They're safe enough where they are. While you're away Charley and I will get things ready for an immediate start."

Sam started off to obey Dick's orders, while the latter led one of the burros up to the cabin door.

There still remained several empty bags in the house.

Under Dick's directions Charley filled one of them with all the canned goods and crackers that remained.

The bag was fastened on the burro's back.

When Sam returned with Carden's saddlebags they were also added to the burro's load.

"Now, we'll start off at once, fellows, and take a course to the south and westward, and feel our way out of the range as best we can. We've got grub enough to last us some time. It may take us a week or ten days even to find our way back to the railroad, but what's the difference, as long as we get there?" said Dick.

"Why not go back the way we came?" said Charley. "That would take us back to the hacienda inside of three days."

"If we knew the way as well as Pedro we might do it in that time; but we don't. We're just as liable to get lost in the range as not without a guide, and as Pedro and his party are sure to take that direction in an effort to re-



capture us as soon as they find we have escaped, why, it is much better for us to take an opposite road, even if it is roundabout. We'll get out of the range somehow."

Accordingly, the little party, mounting three of the burros, and leading the loaded one, left the mining property without any further delay.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRYING TO GET OUT OF THE RANGE.

Judging their course by the position of the sun, they rode as near due south as they could go.

They were soon out of sight of the cabin, but Dick made notes of the landscape for future reference, for, of course, he intended to come back to his mine as soon as possible with a suitable escort that would prevent any interference on the part of Senor Gonzale's overseer.

The deed to the property was in the saddlebags, and as soon as he had had it recorded at Chihuahua no one could take the mine from him.

He knew that Sam's father would see that he got his rights in the matter, and the chances were that gentleman would put the Mexican authorities on Pedro's trail with the view of having the rascal caught and punished.

As for Pepita, Dick had no intention of having her prosecuted for the part her jealousy had induced her to undertake.

He told Sam and Charley that the Senorita must be left out of the story they had to tell.

Dick then proceeded to tell his companions about the treatment he had received from Pedro and Mendez at the cavern.

"What are you going to do about your mine, Dick?" asked Sam.

"I'm going to look after it, don't you fret."

"If you got up a company Charley and me I suppose would come in for a few of the shares," said Sam.

"Sure, you would. I'd see you made a good thing as well as myself. We're chums, you know, and are roughing it together. If I sell the mine as it stands, after its value has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the purchaser, you'll get a rakeoff. So you see, no matter what I may do, you'll be taken care of."

After traveling some miles in a fairly straight direction, they got mixed up in a trackless part of the range, and it took them some hours to make any further headway worth mentioning.

They camped beside a running stream and ate their dinner, after which they lay under the trees and rested for some time.

After three o'clock they resumed their journey.

Night found them in the midst of a long ravine.

After stopping to eat supper, they continued on by the light of the stars.

Later on the moon helped them out, and they did not pause for sleep until close on to midnight.

They were up at sunrise and on their way again, looking for water.

It was eleven o'clock before they came across a stream.

Then they tethered the animals, ate their breakfast and turned in on the ground for rest and sleep.

Only for the fact that getting out of the range seemed to be a serious business, the boys would have felt as happy as larks over their adventure in the wilds of northwestern Mexico.

It was late in the afternoon when they woke up and prepared to go on again.

"I wonder where Pedro and his crowd are by this time?" Sam said.

"Hunting for us, I suppose, over the track by which he brought us to these regions," replied Dick.

"He'll find us, too—I guess nit," grinned Charley.

"He won't dare go back to the hacienda after what has happened," remarked Sam.

"No, I don't think he will. He'll try and dispose of the gold quartz I gave him at the nearest smelter, and probably return to the mine for more. I've got to get back as soon as I can and head him off."

"We'll come back with you, of course," said Sam.

"Sure thing, if your father has no objections."

"He don't object to our keeping you company. He'll see that we're properly protected."

The boys traveled well into the night again, as it was much pleasanter than under the hot sun, which had already made them as brown as berries.

They spent the night in a small cave and awoke again at sunrise.

The third day's journey was the slowest and most difficult they had yet experienced since leaving the mine.

Their way led them through a deeply wooded, narrow canyon, almost impassable in places for the hardy little burros.

They were obliged to take frequent rests, and the moon was shining when they finally camped for the night beside a stream that marked the end of the worst stage of the day's travel.

Next day they ascended the mountains again and got a view of the plains beyond.

"Hurrah!" cried Sam. "We'll soon be out of the range."

Dick and Charley also felt like shouting their satisfaction, but they refrained and contented themselves with gazing upon the landscape beyond the western spur of the Sierra Madre.

Late that afternoon they descended to the plain and camped among the foothills.

They saw a mountain stream a short distance away, but it was not practicable to reach it with the burros from where they were.

While Dick was tethering the animals on the grass Sam and Charley took a couple of empty cans and started for the stream.

Dick was opening a can of corned beef for supper when he heard a shout in the direction taken by his companions, and then a pistol shot.

"Great Caesar!" he cried, starting to his feet. "What does that mean?"

A second shot awoke the echoes of the evening air, and Dick saw the smoke curling up near the mountain stream.

Then came a cry for help in tones that sounded like Charley's voice.

"There's something wrong!" cried Dick, snatching up his rifle and starting for the scene of trouble. "Can it be that

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Pedro and his party have been following on our trail after all?"

He hustled forward and soon came in sight of the stream.

Peering through the bushes, he saw Charley in the hands of Mendez and the other two peons, while Pepita was seated on a burro near by.

There were sounds of someone crashing through the bushes at Dick's left.

He thought it was Sam, but a moment later he saw it was Pedro, with a revolver in his hand.

"He's looking for Sam, who's got away," breathed Dick, following the Mexican's movements.

Suddenly the rascal gave a shout of exultation and pounced down upon an object concealed in the bushes.

In another moment he was dragging Sam from his place of concealment.

Sam uttered a loud shout and struck Pedro a tremendous blow in the face, which caused the overseer to release his hold on him.

The boy darted into the bushes again.

With an imprecation Pedro raised his revolver and took aim at the fleeing boy.

Dick raised his rifle quicker than a flash, covered the Mexican and fired.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CONCLUSION.

Simultaneous with the crack of Dick's rifle Pedro uttered a hoarse cry, and half turning around, fell forward on his back and lay quite still.

The revolver fell upon the ground.

"Come back, Sam," shouted Dick, springing forward to see if he had really killed the Mexican.

Sam recognized his friend's voice after hearing the report of his weapon, and turned back.

"Shot him, have you?" said Sam, picking up Pedro's revolver. "Serves him right if you killed him. He fired twice at me, and I only escaped his bullets by the skin of my teeth."

"No, he isn't dead," said Dick, who was kneeling beside the fallen rascal; "but I guess he's out for good, just the same. Come, we'll leave him here and rescue Charley, who's in the hands of Mendez and Pepita's satellites."

The two boys issued from the bushes into full view of the girl and the peons.

Charley was being bound to a tree.

"Let him go!" cried Dick, covering Mendez with his rifle.

The rascal turned with a snarl, and, seeing the boys, drew the revolver he had in his belt.

Dick was not taking any chances with the Mexicans, so, without trying to parley further with people who understood little, if any, English, he fired at Mendez's arm.

The rascal uttered a scream of pain and dropped the weapon.

Dick had broken his arm with the bullet.

He and Sam then threatened the other two with their weapons, and they threw up their arms in terror of their lives.

The two boys then advanced.

"Pepita," said Dick, "tell those men of yours to release Charley Ross."

The girl said something to them in Spanish, and they undid the ropes that held the boy.

Charley snatched up the revolver dropped by the wounded Mendez and rushed over to his companions.

"What about Pedro?" was the first thing he said.

"He's down and out with a bullet in his chest," said Dick. "Sam, you and Charley go and fetch him over to his friends, and let them see that he's out of business."

The two boys obeyed their young leader, and Pepita uttered a low cry when she saw Pedro borne forward apparently dead.

They laid him under one of the trees and left him to be attended by his associates.

"Well, Pepita," said Dick, walking up to her burro, "are you still an enemy of mine?"

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep.

"There's my hand, Senorita," continued Dick. "I don't bear you any hard feeling for the trouble you got us into. Let us be friends again."

She seized his hand and carried it to her lips.

"I am very unhappy," she cried. "You do not care for me any more, and I don't care if I die."

"Don't talk about dying. Come with us and let us take you back to your home. Leave these fellows to look after themselves. Pedro is a big rascal and deserves all he got, while Mendez isn't much better. They left me bound in a hole in a cave to die, and I should be there now, only luck played in my favor."

"I will come with you," said the girl, looking pretty badly broken up.

In fact, she was almost a wreck of her former dainty self.

A week's roughing among the mountains, while it hadn't hurt her, physically speaking, had demoralized her womanly charms to a considerable extent.

"Fill your cans with water," said Dick to Sam and Charley, "and follow us."

He seized the burro by its rein and started by a roundabout course to regain their camping-ground.

It took three-quarters of an hour to reach their camp by a way practicable for Pepita's burro to follow.

When they got there Dick helped the Senorita to dismount, and he treated her so kindly that she started to cry again, and finally threw her arms around his neck and kissed him with all the ardor of her warm Mexican blood.

The girl was now thoroughly repentant and Dick assured her that he forgave her, and would not tell her parents what she had been guilty of.

They had their usual supper, in which Pepita participated.

She told Dick that she had never intended to have Pedro ill-treat him.

Her object in letting Pedro take charge of him was to frighten him into agreeing to marry her.

Pedro had sworn not to injure him, and she had believed him.

He had broken his oath, and she was glad he was now suffering the consequences.

She said she hoped he would die, for if he recovered he would try to kill Dick out of revenge, and might succeed.

Then she asked Dick if he really loved the girl of the photograph, and intended to marry her.

"No, I don't love any girl. She's just a dear friend of



my sister's, and I like her a whole lot myself, but I never thought about marrying her. I'm too young to think about marrying for several years yet."

Pepita seemed greatly comforted by Dick's assurance that he did not love nor intend to marry the original of the photograph.

A ray of hope came into her heart that there was still a chance for her to win this young American to whom she had surrendered her affections.

After supper Dick said they would continue their journey, as he did not care to stay all night in the vicinity of the enemy, who, though they were not very formidable now, were still capable of giving them trouble.

They continued on across the plain for several hours, and finally camped near a stream.

The boys alternately kept watch during the night, but the party was not disturbed.

Next day they reached a break in the lower part of the range through which Pepita said they could easily ride to the hacienda.

Dick agreed to see that she got home before he and his friends went on to the railroad.

Just at sundown they came in sight of the hacienda, and half an hour later they were at the front door.

Pepita was embraced with joy by her anxious mother, while the boys were received with open arms for bringing her back.

The Senorita's father and several of his hands were searching the range for her, and they had not returned when the boys took their leave next morning.

Pepita had a tearful parting with Dick, who felt sorry for the girl.

He promised that he would call at the hacienda later on and see her again, with which assurance the lovesick Senorita had to be content.

A peon was sent with the boys to see that they reached the railroad all right.

Mr. Swift received the boys back in a matter-of-fact way.

He had not the least idea of the strenuous adventures through which his son and companions had passed since they left the railroad, but supposed they had been at the hacienda ever since he got word from Senor Gonzales that the lads were to spend a week or two at his home.

His astonishment may be imagined when the boys told their story, which omitted any particular reference to Pepita.

Dick's statement about the gold mine that had come into his possession in so singular a manner amazed Mr. Swift, and it was not until the boy exhibited the papers from the saddlebags, and the bunch of golden nuggets, that he actually placed full credence in the story.

Then Dick asked him for his advice and assistance in the matter.

The engineer readily agreed to see him through, and secure him the undisputed ownership of the valuable property.

Next day the three boys accompanied him to Chihuahua.

John Carden's deed of conveyance was duly and legally registered, and then a mining expert was secured to visit the mine and pass upon its probable value.

Mr. Swift accompanied the expedition to the western

spur of the Sierra Madre and saw the property with his own eyes.

Carden's estimate of the mine was confirmed by the expert, who declared that the ore in sight furnished sufficient evidence for estimating the value of the property at several millions.

On the return of the party to the railroad Mr. Swift advised the formation of a company for the purpose of working the mine.

Dick agreed to anything that he advocated.

Mr. Swift accordingly set the plan in motion.

Several capitalists of Chihuahua were induced to take the matter up in return for a substantial interest in the mine.

The company was duly formed and the engineer saw that the controlling interest was secured to Dick.

The boy gave him a power-of-attorney to represent him, as he and his friends had to return north.

Mr. Swift, as Dick's representative, had himself elected president and general manager, and gave considerable of his attention to the development of the mine.

The following summer the three boys revisited Mexico and found the mine in full and paying operation.

Dick also found Pepita more attractive than ever and just as much devoted to him.

In fact, she played her cards so well that before he returned north he had, with her parents' consent, agreed to marry her when he had completed his education.

Perhaps the fact that he was to become president and general manager of the mine himself at the end of his schooldays, which would necessitate him taking up his residence in the State of Chihuahua, had a good deal to do with Pepita's conquest.

When he finally returned to Mexico to marry Pepita and take up his residence permanently at the old hacienda, Sam Swift went with him to live at Chihuahua as secretary of the company.

To-day Dick Hadley's mine is known as one of the richest in the western section of the Sierra Madre Range.

It has already made Dick a wealthy man, while Sam Swift and Charley Ross are each drawing large incomes from their stock.

A year or two ago Charley went to visit Dick on his own wedding trip, and then the three boys met together for the first time in five years.

Dick and Sam had a whole lot to tell Charley about the workings of the mine, and you may well believe that they did not forget to talk over the time when for a brief interval they were boy gold diggers in Mexico.

THE END.

Read "A BOY STOCK BROKER; OR, FROM ERRAND BOY TO MILLIONAIRE," which will be the next number (138) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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# Fame and Fortune Weekly

NEW YORK, MAY 15, 1908.

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## GOOD STORIES.

Gamblers are notoriously superstitious, as all who have visited Monte Carlo know. There you will find a parasitic class, who live on the superstition of the frequenters of the tables. They are hunchbacks, and the gamblers imagine that they are certain to have a run of luck after touching the humps of these unhappy wretches. Accordingly, one finds at each entrance to the casino a row of waiting hunchbacks, ready to bring luck to anyone who will pay them. Each has his own list of patrons, and a very comfortable income some of them earn. Not a few of them are normal in every respect, their humps being simply padding and framework, strapped upon their shoulders. One such was recently exposed, and punished summarily. A rumor had spread among the gaming fraternity that he was a fraud; so one of his patrons, instead of patting him gently on the back, as usual, gave him a resounding thwack, which effectually dislodged the bogus hump. Having thus effected a record quick cure, the gamblers determined that their patient must also take the waters in the lake of the casino gardens in case he should have a relapse. After a lengthy dip he was so thoroughly cured that he left Monte Carlo, never to return. But there are still bogus mascots at the doors of the gaming hall, and there always will be, till the foolish superstition dies out.

In many churches of Provence and Italy, especially those near the sea, ex voto paintings placed on the walls, in accordance with vows made by pilgrims in moments of danger, are often remarkable for their frames. Among the curiosities may be enumerated laths formed of splinters from ships that have been wrecked, also frames made of pieces of heavy cables, occasionally painted bright hues, but sometimes left in their primitive gray color, splashed with 'ar. Nailed to the laths surrounding a painting representing sailors fighting with fierce savages, may be seen African or Polynesian spears and darts, or swords made of hardwood, evidently mementos of terrible struggles. Sailors or landsmen who have made vows during times of peril at sea, and who have no trophies to display, will surround their paintings with broad bands of wood heavily incrustated with shells and seaweed, not infrequently of rare and extremely beautiful kinds.

Is it not a fact that men really spend in treating amounts that they would hesitate to give away, no matter how deserving the charity? It is a trait of human character that comes through this all-absorbing disposition to "hold your end up" when with a friend. Hundreds of men take thousands of drinks that they do not want, and other hundreds pay for thousands that are not desired. Two men meet, and one says: "Mighty glad to see you. Let's have something." Neither, generally, needs, or even wants, a drink. But the man who offers it wants to show that he is generous. He takes

this method of proving that he is glad to meet his friend. The friend, after he has taken the drink that he did not want, to prove that he, too, is a good fellow, insists upon a second round. The German custom of entering a saloon, taking a drink, and paying for it, and for no others, if adopted in America, would prove a blessing. The American custom of treating is decidedly a curse. What we do for friendship's sake costs us many a dollar and many a pang.

A Boston psychologist was recently reminded of the story of the Russian jailer, who, changing his occupation, found the chief interest of his leisure moments in catching birds, putting them in cages, and selling them to the highest bidder. The scientist, having to attend a series of lectures in a large public hall, struck up acquaintance with the janitor of the building, and soon noted in him a suggestive bent of mind. The man seemed fond of counting the people, and would occasionally report the exact number present. "We have 115 here to-night," he would say, or "Just 201 all told"; or, when the hall was crowded, "I make it 370." There was a problem in all this, but it took some time for the psychologist to solve it. A bit of friendly, familiar talk, continually renewed, did the business, for it brought out the fact that the janitor had spent many of the previous years of his life as warden in an Eastern prison. With rifle on shoulder, from some enclosing wall, the man had counted his convicts until the habit became ingrained. In the recesses of his brain the lecture hall took the shape of a jail yard, and the audiences were his prisoners. He counted, because he wished to know if all were there.

## JOKES AND JESTS.

Host—Why did you write all our guests that this is to be a very informal affair? Hostess—So I'd be sure to be the best-dressed woman here.

Candid Wayfarer—Yes, I've been in prison. Benevolent Lady—You should be ashamed to own it. Candid Wayfarer—I didn't own it. I was only a lodger.

Society Lady—Are you not afraid when the big waves dash over your ship? Stay-at-home Naval Officer—Not at all. Boy—I know the reason—'cause he's never on it.

"Where there's so much smoke there must be some fire." The boss was speaking. He had just detected the office boy consuming a cigarette on the premises. The adage was verified immediately. The boy got the fire.

She—Gladys is so sorry she took her engagement ring round to the jeweler's to have it valued. He—Why? Did he say it was too cheap? She—Oh, no! He said he would keep it for a bit, as Freddie hadn't settled up for it yet.

The cat had eaten the canary. "I haven't any compunctions about it, either," she said, picking her teeth with her claws. "I couldn't eat the pianola on the first floor, or the graphophone on the third, but I could make a meal of the musician on the second floor, and I've done it." With a satisfied grin on her face, she curled up on the floor, behind the gas range, and went to sleep.

"Never," groaned a Euclid Avenue picture dealer, the other day, "never try to argue a woman into believing that she ought to pay a bill when she thinks otherwise. I tried it this morning—presented a bill for some stuff ordered two months ago. Here was her irrefutable logic: 'I never ordered any pictures. If I did, you never delivered them. If you did, I never got them. If I did, I paid for them. If I didn't, I must have had some good reason for it. And if I had, of course I won't pay.' What d'you think of that?"



## A PACK PEDDLER'S ADVENTURE

By Kit Klyde.

"I have been a pack peddler for more than twenty years," said the old man, as he whiffed away at his pipe to get it alight, "and you may suppose I have met with some stirring adventures. I have traveled a great deal in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota, and for weeks and months I have been on the alert, not only to preserve the contents of my pack but to defend my life. My line of trade has been Yankee notions, with jewelry added. I have had with me at one time as much as \$2,000 worth of gold and silver watches, earrings, finger-rings, etc. I have sat on a log beside a highway in Kansas and sold \$400 worth of stock to three or four men, and I have disposed of \$50 worth of ladies' jewelry at a pioneer cabin which had neither floors nor partitions.

"On two different occasions I ate dinner at the cabin of old Bender, the Kansas fiend. On the first occasion the old man was away, and I saw only two women about the place. Six months later, when I called again, it was about 11 o'clock in the forenoon. Then I saw old Bender for the first time. I had heard him described as a pleasant-faced old man, whom no one would suspect, but I tell you the very first look at him put me on my guard. For the first time in a year I felt that my life was in danger. The same two slatternly women were about the house, and there was a young man, whom I took to be old Bender's son. This young man disappeared soon after I arrived, but whether he hid in the house or rode off across the prairie I never knew. Bender's women purchased about \$2 worth of notions, and the old man dickered with me for an hour over a gold watch. It seems he had but a small stock of cash, but he offered me personal property in exchange. He had two or three silver watches, all of which had been carried, two or three revolvers, two bosom pins, made of lumps of pure gold, and three or four pairs of valuable cuff-buttons. We had nearly effected an exchange, when he suddenly decided to leave the matter open until after dinner.

"Months afterward, when the discoveries of his crimes came out, I thought the matter over, and could remember just how nicely he played me. Without seeming to interrogate me for information, he asked how long a trip I had made, what success I had met with, who I was, where I lived, and whom I knew in that locality. The old murderer was figuring up the chances of my being missed in case he put an end to me, and he had a curiosity to know beforehand what the harvest would be. While I told you that I did not like his looks, and that I had a creepy feeling in his presence, I had no idea of an attempt to murder by daylight, and in the manner he was planning for. I had a trusty revolver, and I had the courage to defend myself. Had I met him out on the prairie, or had we been jogging together along some lonely highway, I should have been prepared to pull my pistol at his first movement.

"Dinner was announced soon after 12 o'clock. I took my pack with me into the dining-room, where I found the table set for one. There were three rooms in the house. The front room was a general sitting-room and office combined. Bender kept a sort of tavern, you know, and travelers had this front room. The next room back was the dining-room and family-room combined. There was a bedroom leading off. On the walls of this family-room were a few old-fashioned prints in old-fashioned frames, a shelf on which stood a clock, and a few scant evidences of women's presence. The back room was the kitchen.

"I had my eyes wide open when I entered that dining-room, and the very first thing I noticed was that the table was set lengthwise of the room, and that my chair and plate had been so placed that my back would be toward the kitchen door, which was not over five or six feet away. Had it been at the other end my back would have been toward the office door. The first move I made was to turn the chair around to the side and sit down. I now faced the bedroom door, and had the other doors to my right and left, while there was no window behind me. The younger woman was in the room, and she looked at me in a queer, strange way as I upset the ar-

rangements she had perfected. Bender did not look into the room for two or three minutes, and then retired without speaking. A minute later he passed around the house and entered the kitchen by the back door. While I could not see him, I heard him and the woman whispering together, and I caught the words as spoken by her:

"I tell you he did it himself!"

"I could not catch a word from him, and directly he went out and she came in with the rest of the eatables. Her face was flushed and her manner very nervous. She put on a plate of bread and a platter of meat, and then went out for the coffee. As she set the cup and saucer on the board she partly upset the cup and spilled half the contents on the table.

"Excuse me—I'm sorry," she said, as I shoved back to keep the hot liquid from dripping on my legs.

"Never mind—no harm done," I replied.

"It was so careless of me. You had better change your seat to the end while I sop it up."

"Oh, don't mind. I'm not hungry, and shall eat but a few mouthfuls anyway. I forgot to tell you that I preferred water to coffee."

"But—you—you—"

"I'm all right."

"She gave me one of the queerest looks I ever got, first flushing up and then turning pale. Spilling that coffee was a put-up job to get my back to the kitchen door. I suspected it then; a few months later I had plenty of horrible proofs. Before the meal was finished old Bender looked in from the kitchen door and drew back, and when I shoved away and entered the office he was not there, and did not show up for five minutes. When I went to dinner a double-barreled shotgun stood in the corner of the office. When I came out it was gone. The old man came in after a while, and it was easy to see that he had to force himself to converse. I paid him for the meal and was ready to go. It was a lonely road I had to travel, with no other house for miles, and it suddenly struck me that the younger man had gone on to lie in ambush and shoot me in case I escaped assassination at the house. For a minute or two I quite lost my sand, and you can judge what a relief it was to me to see a team drive up with three men in the vehicle, and room for one more. They stopped to water the horses and chat a few moments, and readily gave me a lift on my way. I did not impart my suspicions to them, and it was not until the horrible stories came out that I felt sure in my own mind what a close call I had had.

"Do I know what became of old Bender and his family? You remember that they fled the country, or that the papers so reported, and for months we used to hear from one locality and another of the fugitives being seen or captured. I have reason to believe that they never got out of the State, nor yet a hundred miles from that lone tavern on the prairie, with its horrible cellar underneath and its graveyard in the rear. Bands of men were riding in this or that direction, bent on vengeance, and one of these overhauled the party. I have been told this on the best authority. As Bender had shown no mercy toward the unsuspecting travelers who were shot in the back from that kitchen door as they ate at his table, none was shown to him or his. They were wiped out, and planted where their bones will never be turned up to the light of day."

## THE LUMINOUS LIGHT

"We see some queer sights," said a diver, who, rigged out in the submarine armor, all but the helmet, was waiting his turn to go down; "and, to tell the honest truth, I don't like the business. It's all right when you are to examine a filled-in channel, or to lay the foundations of a pillar for a bridge, or the like of that, but we don't always have that kind of work.

"I remember," continued the man, "a few years ago my boss, or the contractor I had engaged to work for for a year, got an order for a couple of divers to go to the south side of Cuba, near the Isle of Pines. We did not know what was wanted, but rather liked the job, never having been South before.

"We got the order by telegraph one night, and the next day sailed for Key West. In five days we were in Havana; then



across the island, and in less than two weeks were on the spot.

"It seems that two weeks before there had been a terrible hurricane, and the country was torn up in a fearful way. Where there had been five feet of water at low tide the coral was piled up and ground together, making a regular wall around the whole reef. I remember hearing a gentleman say that if a thousand men had worked five years they couldn't have shown so much work as was done by the waves in ten hours.

"The country was literally cleaned bare; trees blown completely away; and they showed one brick or cement house that had been built alongside of a lumber yard, that was completely riddled by five-inch scantlings, so that the ranch looked like a porcupine with scantling spines all over it.

"During the hurricane a big ship had been sunk, but, who she was, and where she came from, no one knew—only the next morning after the gale the people saw the pieces of wreck along the shore, and a day or so afterward a fisherman saw the hulk in a channel in about thirty feet of water. He marked the place, sold his claim to a wrecking company, and so we were sent for.

"My partner and myself rowed out to her the night we got there. The water was just like glass, and you could see the smallest thing on the bottom. They had a big barrel moored over her, and there she lay, a big ship, and not a mast, except one, in her. To get there she must have blown over a reef where you could wade along at low tide.

"We found the place, and she had dug a regular canal as she thumped along, and started all her timbers, and when she reached deep water had settled. It looked like an easy job, and the next day we had our fixings, pumps, etc., rigged on a fore-and-aft schooner, and were anchored over her.

"They hadn't found man, woman or child on the beach, so we made up our minds that something would be aboard of her, and concluded to go down together. It got on toward night before we struck the water, and when we reached the deck it was dark, so we had to feel our way about. She was a fine ship, every hatch battened down. The masts, all but one, were broken short off; the galley, rails, house, even the capstan and davits, were swept away.

"I dropped over her cutwater by the fore-chains, and found that it wouldn't pay to try and raise her, as she was split, and started from stem to stern. The planks seemed to be bent and twisted, as if she had been struck by a ram.

"Though she had only been down a short time, there were all sorts of crabs and things clinging to her, and the strangest thing about it was, they all seemed to be afire. Some of the starfish looked like red-hot stars, and every time we moved great flames of light seemed to break out and spread, so that the water appeared to be in a continual blaze, that wasn't pleasant, to say the least.

"We edged around the hull to the stern, hoping to be able to make out the name, but it was gone—scraped off, probably, as she came over the reef.

"We then went to work on the cabin, climbing over the sides, and when we reached the deck the whole ship seemed lighted as if by electricity. It startled my partner so that he grabbed hold of me, nearly knocking me over. All around was the mysterious, sparkling light, like thousands of stars twinkling and blazing.

"I had heard about the phosphorescence of the sea in these latitudes, and concluded that was what it was. We found the cabin door battened down, or locked from the inside. We signaled for crowbars, and soon started a door. As it swung in, it seemed as if we were drawn irresistibly in, and almost before I knew it we landed on a table.

"And such a sight! Everything was torn to pieces. Books, shelves, and chairs were floating about, and tied to one of the latter was a woman. The legs of the table were made fast to the body of a man, who had died hard, apparently.

"The queer phosphorescence had floated in after us, and lighted up their faces with a ghostly glare. I tell you it was enough to make a man's hair rise, and I believe mine would if it hadn't been held down by my helmet.

"Every motion of the water as we stumbled about produced

flashes of light that played about the hair of the dead woman, and she seemed to be moving as if alive. We got them out, however, and sent them up, and soon found two more bodies in the state-room. They must have been grantees, as the room was fixed up in the most gorgeous manner. Old armor, that looked like silver, hung on the walls; the curtains were of velvet, and the box of jewels that we sent up must have been a fortune in itself, only we didn't know what it was then, or it might not have gone up.

"We had our orders to send up the bodies first, and as soon as we sent up the last, went to work on the main hatch. I thought once or twice I had seen a big light moving about at a distance, but did not notice it particularly until we got the bar under, the combing of the hatch, when it came so plain that my mate stopped short.

"The light looked like the headlight of a locomotive, and came slowly on, moving this way and that, like some great bird. Nearer it came, and so great was its luminosity that it appeared like daylight all about. All at once we saw what it was—a luminous shark!

"The same idea must have struck us both at once—that was to get down the hatch. We gave a big haul on the bar; there was a rush of water, and then, to our horror, black forms seemed to spring from the hole all around us. The light fell on them so that they seemed like so many demons.

"The shark made a dash among them, and then I signaled, and was jerked to the surface, my mate in my arms, for he'd fainted dead away. As I suppose you have surmised, the ship was a slaver, and as soon as we opened the hatch the poor fellows that had been drowned floated out."

"But how about the shark?" asked one of the listeners.

"We caught it afterward, and for four hours after it died it gave out the phosphorescent light. They call them 'nurses' down there. But it's my turn to go down."

The story of the shark told by the diver would almost seem an exaggeration were it not a fact well known to science. The first luminous shark was caught by the well-known naturalist, Dr. Bennett, off the Australian coast.

It was very similar to the nurse of the Florida reef, and it is a most remarkable sight, giving out a light, even when out of the water, that can be read by with perfect ease, and even beaming in ghostly radiance for four or five hours after the death of the shark.

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The alarming destruction of Texas trees, through the agency of the poisonous mistletoe, has induced M. B. Davis, secretary of the Texas Audubon Society, to sound a warning to those interested in trees, to destroy the mistletoe before it, in turn, denudes the State of its forests. "Every municipality in Texas is afflicted with the pest, and it has been stated by an authority that the life of a tree, when thoroughly inoculated with mistletoe poison, will terminate in about seven years," says Mr. Davis. "It is carried from one tree to another by certain birds feeding on the berries, and wherever it finds lodgment on trees susceptible to its deadly parasitic growth, its blight proves fatal in time, unless heroic treatment is applied. At the season when the evergreen parasite is clearly discernible upon the bare boughs, the work should be done. The Texas mistletoe (*Phoradendron flavescens*) differs materially from its kindred parasite evergreen of Europe (*Viscum album*), held in veneration by the Druids, which is kept in check in the Old World, but cultivated to some extent for winter decoration. The variety in the cotton States is far more pernicious, and must be wholly exterminated, or the trees will all perish from its baleful blight. Any one may observe from car windows that entire forests are being killed by mistletoe. It is a beautiful but horrible parasite, and can only be destroyed finally by cutting off the entire bough on which its growth appears. The hackberry, which is popular in the cities as a shade tree, is one of the favorites of these poisonous parasites, and in nearly every city in this State where hackberry trees have been planted, about 25 per cent. of them have already died from mistletoe poison."



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